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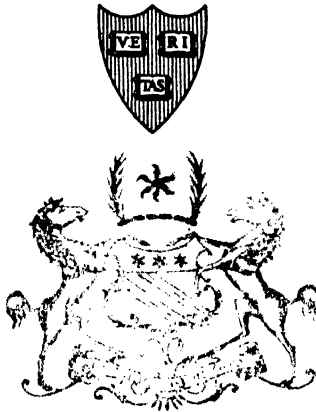
Karl Marx's Interpretation of History

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TO
OLGA E. BOBER
MY WIFE

PREFACE

IN this essay Marx and Engels are treated like one personality. The two friends thought and worked together, and it would be impossible to dis sever the thoughts of one from those of the other. Even if the task were possible, it is doubtful whether it would yield fruitful results.

Nor is frequent reference made to whatever ideas on the subject the two writers entertained prior to 1847, for their conception of history began to mature only after that date. My aim in the pages which follow is not to examine the growth of Marx's mind; my object is rather to present a more or less comprehensive analysis of a famous and much-discussed doctrine.

This study has been suggested by Professor A. A. Young, and the work has been carried on under his general guidance. For his kindness, his inspiration, and his valuable suggestions I am deeply grateful. I am also indebted to Professors F. W. Taussig, A. P. Usher, C. H. McIlwain, and A. M. Schlesinger for advice on various points; and to Professor E. S. Mason and Mr. R. Opie for having read the manuscript and made corrections. All these scholars are at Harvard University.

It is a duty and a pleasure to record that my wife rendered invaluable assistance at each stage of the work, and bore with patience and fortitude the trials of an impecunious aspirant for the doctorate.

MANDELL M. BOBER

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PART I

THE MATERIAL BASIS OF HISTORY

The prime movers, Marx urges, and the fundamental causes of civilization are not to be sought in idealistic realms, but in much humbler regions. To procure a livelihood, man is compelled to come to terms with nature. He must work. This is his primordial task, and to it he devotes his first efforts and his immediate attention. Herein indeed lies the foundation of all history. Work, production, is the basic cause; all the rest is the consequent: society, institutions, ideas, progress. This is what Engels had in mind when he naively stated in his biographical sketch of Marx: "History for the first time was placed on its real foundation; the obvious fact, hitherto totally neglected, that first of all men must eat, drink, have shelter and clothing, and therefore must work, before they can struggle for supremacy and devote themselves to politics, religion, philosophy, etc.,—this obvious fact at last found historical recognition."¹

Marx and Engels by no means make clear the various elements and characteristics embodied in their idea of the material basis of social life. They employ numerous ways of designating it: first, expressions centering around the word production, as "conditions of production," "form of production," "process of production," "mode of production," "organization of production"; second, the phrase "productive forces" and its variants, as "material productive forces," "material forces of production," "powers of production." Therefore, if we are to ascertain what Marx considers the dominant agency in human affairs, we must first analyze the concepts of production and of productive forces.

Some supporters of Marx, as well as some of his critics, maintain that by both these concepts he means nothing more than technique. They claim that his view was that the technical devices and the instruments employed in the process of production have an overpowering influence on the phenomena of human history, and that the Marxian interpretation of history is therefore essentially a technological interpretation.

¹ Reprinted in Wilhelm Liebknecht's *Karl Marx, Biographical Memoirs*, p. 49. Particulars about works mentioned in this and all subsequent references will be found in the bibliography.

Thus Professor Werner Sombart quotes from Marx's preface to the *Critique of Political Economy* and declares:

If these sentences are to have, in general, any meaning, it can only be this: given a definite basis of technical development — for what “productive forces” can be if not technical potentialities is hard to comprehend. This technique determines the formation of economic life . . . this formation determines all other culture. Or, as I expressed it previously, economic activity is a function of technique, the remaining cultural phenomena are a function of economic activity, which means (and Marx must mean this if his words are not to be mere words): only a single economic potentiality (*Wirtschaftsmöglichkeit*) is conceivable with a given technique, only a single cultural potentiality with a given mode of economic activity (*Wirtschaftsweise*).¹

Professor Paul Barth, the author of the excellent book *Philosophie der Geschichte als Soziologie*, is of the same mind. He argues that Marx contributed nothing in his interpretation of history, and merely systematized Saint-Simon's ideas relating to technology and class struggle. He points out that, whereas Saint-Simon awards an independent status to ideas, Marx made them entirely subordinate to the economic movement, and considered all other social phenomena as resultants of technological progress; only instead of technology he, Marx, generally employed such expressions as “productive forces” or “mode of production of material life.” With Marx, Barth continues, all collective thought, action, and suffering are phenomena directly or indirectly derived from the development of material productive forces, which latter are themselves primary phenomena, without independent causes.² Barth supports his contentions by an array of quotations from Marx, italicizing such terms as “production,” “modes of production and exchange,” “material productive forces,” “process of production of life,” and the like. He concludes: “There is therefore according to Marx this causal series: a determined state of technique — determined industrial form (*Betriebsform*) — determined property system . . . — determined political superstructure — determined social forms of consciousness, which are characterized as religious, artistic, or philosophical.”³

¹ *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* (1911), vol. xxxiii, 316.

² *Philosophie der Geschichte als Soziologie*, pp. 629, 633-635.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 635-638, 643.

Professor A. H. Hansen follows the same method as Barth. He cites several passages in which he italicizes "instruments," "material production," and the like, and affirms: "Clearly this is technology and not economics. . . . From these quotations it must be clear that . . . he [Marx] finds the foundation upon which the economic structure is built in technology, in the mechanical modes of production. He distinguishes, in short, between the economic basis of society and the technological basis of society."¹

Other writers, socialists and non-socialists, agree that Marx erects the whole realm of civilization on this narrow technological basis. But many others insist that he has a broader view. Among these we find Professor Seligman,² Tugan-Baranowsky,³ H. Cunow,⁴ and others.

Which group is right?

It is true that we can find several passages in the writings of Marx which state more or less definitely that great importance is to be attached to the rôle of instruments in history, and which hint at a technological theory of social development. A sentence frequently quoted by those who hold that Marx adheres to this narrower conception declares: "The windmill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist."⁵

H. Cunow, the present editor of the noted orthodox socialistic organ *Die Neue Zeit*, argues that Marx merely had in mind to affirm here that a stage of economic development where the hand-mill flourishes corresponds to feudalism, and that a stage where the steam-mill is prevalent corresponds to capitalism; and, further, Marx did not intend to maintain that technique determines the form of society, for in the next sentence he teaches that the mode of production, and not technique, conditions the changes in

¹ *Quarterly Journal of Economics* (1921-22), vol. xxxvi, 73, 74.

² *Economic Interpretation of History*, pp. 57, 58, 63.

³ *Marxismus*, pp. 8-9.

⁴ "Technik und Kultur," *Neue Zeit*, vol. xxix, no. 2, pp. 855-859; "Die Stellung der Technik in der Marxschen Wirtschaftsauffassung." *Ibid.*, vol. xxxix, no. 2, pp. 316-322, 348-352.

⁵ Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 119.

social relations.¹ The qualification urged by Cunow has weight. It is clear, however, that Marx imputes to instruments vast power in bringing about social transformations.²

There are also several statements in the first volume of *Capital* wherein technique receives a good deal of prominence. Marx says:

Relics of by-gone instruments of labor possess the same importance for the investigation of extinct economic forms of society, as do fossil bones for the determination of extinct species of animals. It is not the articles made, but how they are made, and by what instruments, that enables us to distinguish different economic epochs. Instruments of labor not only supply a standard (*Gradmesser*) of the degree of development to which human labor has attained, but they are also indicators of the social conditions under which that labor is carried on.³

It may be contended, however, and with some degree of confidence, that the tenor of this pronouncement is not that instruments constitute the cause, the acting force, bringing about new economic epochs; they are of moment, rather, as an index of the scale of development attained by labor, and as a symbol of the social conditions attendant upon a given economic epoch. Indicators are not causes, and it is the causes at work in history that we are seeking. Thus Marx talks in a like manner of labor organizations. Labor combinations, he suggests, have reached such a stage that their degree of development in a country "marks clearly the level which that country occupies in the hierarchy of the world market."⁴ He does not mean to intimate that labor combinations are the factor determining a country's position in the hierarchy of markets; they are indexes. Engels refers in a

¹ *Neue Zeit*, vol. xxix, no. 2 (1911), p. 856 n. The English translation of Marx's *Poverty of Philosophy* has "material productivity." This is more accurate than Cunow's translation "mode of production" (*Produktionsweise*), for the original has "productivité matérielle." Marx wrote this book in French.

² In the *Communist Manifesto* there is this well-known passage: "The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society" (p. 16). This statement does not designate instruments as the sole causes of changes in social relations; it leaves room for other causes. But it is obvious that it awards them tremendous influence.

³ *Capital*, vol. i, 200.

⁴ *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 187.

similar way to universal suffrage.¹ An indicator, a characteristic mark of anything, is not its determining cause, any more than the quicksilver indicating the temperature is the cause of cold and heat.

However, two opinions expressed in the same volume, but relegated to footnotes, are very significant. One reads:

However little our written histories up to this time notice the development of material production, which is the basis of all social life, and therefore of all real history, yet prehistoric times have been classified in accordance with the results, not of so-called historical, but of materialistic investigations. These periods have been divided, to correspond with the materials from which their implements and weapons are made, namely, into the stone, the bronze, and the iron ages.²

The other declaration is even more explicit:

Darwin has interested us in the history of Nature's Technology, that is, in the formation of the organs of plants and animals, which organs serve as instruments of production for sustaining life. Does not the history of the productive organs of man, of organs that are the material basis of all social organization, deserve equal attention? . . . Technology discloses man's mode of dealing with Nature, the process of production by which he sustains his life, and thereby also lays bare the mode of formation of his social relations, and of the mental conceptions that flow from them.³

This list is well-nigh exhaustive, so far as Marx is concerned. Nowhere, perhaps, can one find in the writings of Engels a definite, unqualified statement that instruments constitute the motive power of history. The nearest approach is found in a letter written by him in 1894. He advances there the following opinions. By the economic conditions, which serve as the basis of social history, is understood the manner in which men of a given society produce their subsistence and exchange it. They include therefore the ensemble of the technique of production and of transportation. This technique determines (*bestimmt*) the mode of exchange and of distribution of the products and thereby (*damit*) the division of society into classes, thereby the relations of domination and subjection, thereby the state, politics, law, and so forth. Economic conditions comprise, further, the geographical basis, the survivals of previous economic stages, conserved through tradition or *vis*

¹ "Universal suffrage is the gauge of the maturity of the working class." *Origin of the Family*, p. 211.

² *Capital*, vol. I, 200 n.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 406 n.

inertiae, and, naturally, also the external *milieu* enveloping the given social form. He concludes: "We regard the economic conditions as determining (*bedingende*), in the last instance, historical development. But race is itself an economic factor."¹ Engels here regards technique as a potent agent in history, but he hastens to include other, non-technical, elements among the economic condition which govern history.²

He also seems to attach much prominence to the potency of implements when in his *Origin of the Family* he summarizes briefly Morgan's stages of primitive society. The middle stage of savagery is introduced by the use of fish and fire, and the higher stage by the invention of the bow and arrow; the three stages of barbarism begin, respectively, with the art of pottery, with agriculture and the domestication of animals, and with the melting of iron.³

However, we must keep in mind that in the preface to this book Engels announces that primitive society is based primarily on the organization of the family and not on the development of labor.⁴ It is evidently for this reason that he devotes only eight pages to a summary of production under savagery and barbarism, whereas the discussion of the structure of the primitive family is extended over about seventy pages. Again, not all of the above earmarks have reference to technique. The use of fish as food, the art of pottery, the taming of animals, and the widening range of agricultural pursuits can hardly be taken as designations of instruments. In the third place, the various stages of savagery and barbarism are not regarded by Marx and Engels as so many distinct modes of production; on the contrary, all these stages combined represent one productive system, termed the gens. Engels

¹ Reprinted in L. Woltmann's *Der Historische Materialismus*, pp. 248 ff., and in A. Labriola's *Socialisme et philosophie*, pp. 257 ff.

² One may add the following: "The whole of history up to the present time is to be regarded as the history of the period extending from the time of the practical discovery of the transformation of mechanical movement into heat to that of the transformation of heat into mechanical movement." *Landmarks of Scientific Socialism. Anti-Dühring*, p. 148. It is doubtful whether this statement is germane to the question at hand; especially if we turn to the context, which is concerned with a discussion of freedom and necessity.

³ Engels, *Origin of the Family*, pp. 27-34.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

makes many a statement to this effect in this book.¹ Marx, likewise, as will be seen in due course, finds four modes of production in history, and the first mode is the gens, and not this or that period of savagery or barbarism.²

The upholders of the view that Marx adheres to the narrower conception point to other utterances in support of their claim. But there Marx and Engels do not mention instruments; they speak rather of "production" or of "material productive forces" as the basis of history. Professor Barth cites: "A given civil right is only the expression of a definite development of property, that is, of production."³ Professor Hansen, claiming that Engels agrees with Marx in the emphasis on the technological basis of society, quotes as evidence Engels's statement that the "ultimate cause and the great moving power of all important historic events" is to be found in the "changes in the modes of production and exchange."⁴ These critics assume that "production" and "productive forces" are synonymous with "instruments."

However, in spite of the reservations which can be made respecting many of the foregoing citations, it must be granted that at times a good deal of reliance is placed by Marx and Engels on the efficacy of technique, and that those who give the narrower construction to Marx's view are not resting their case on wholly untenable ground. Wilhelm Liebknecht tells us that Marx, excited and flushed over an electric locomotive that he had seen on exhibition on Regent Street in London, at once became filled with expectations of a speedy revolution. "Now the problem is solved, —" he exclaimed, "the consequences are indefinable. In the wake of the economic revolution the political must necessarily follow, for the latter is only the expression of the former."⁵ Marx at times enjoyed making history hastily in his closet with his individual assortment of especially prepared formulas.

¹ "A growth of the middle stage and a product of further development during the upper stage of savagery, the gens reached its prime . . . in the lower stage of barbarism" (p. 191).

² See below, pp. 45 ff.

³ Barth, *Philosophie der Geschichte als Soziologie*, p. 636.

⁴ *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, vol. xxxvi, 75-76.

⁵ W. Liebknecht, *Karl Marx, Biographical Memoirs*, p. 57.

CHAPTER II

THE MODE OF PRODUCTION

BUT the whole case cannot be conceded to the claimants of the technological interpretation. We cannot admit that, by and large, the theory of Marx and Engels is a technological theory, and that to the searcher for the Archimedian lever which would move the universe of social history they would recommend the instruments of production. The adherents of this narrower conception are not convincing enough. They draw their evidence from a handful of scattered citations, some important, others doubtful; they assume that whenever "production" or "productive forces" are mentioned, "instruments" are meant. The fact is that Marx and Engels seldom took sufficient pains to elaborate carefully each concept they employed and each theory they advanced. Hence the innumerable obscurities, inconsistencies, and contradictions that baffle the critical reader. Roscher once said about Marx: "... this gifted but not acute (*scharfsinnig*) man was little capable of reducing complicated phenomena to their constituent elements."¹ One may disagree with Roscher's verdict upon Marx's ability, but no one can deny that Marx's looseness of expression is perplexing. Often, when the elaboration of a concept is crucial in the discussion, he coins a new term instead, and speeds on with his argument, leaving the confused reader with yet another term to puzzle over. He had been writing and talking class and class struggle since 1847, but it never occurred to him that such terms had to be explained. Only a quarter of a century later he undertook to discuss the nature of a class in the last pages of the third volume of *Capital*; but the attempt was left uncompleted.

We must therefore proceed with caution. Is Professor Sombart justified in declaring without ado that by productive forces Marx

¹ W. Roscher, *Geschichte der National-Oekonomik in Deutschland*, p. 1021.

means only "technical possibilities"? Is Professor Barth right in concluding that Marx makes technological progress the basis of all social phenomena, while acknowledging that Marx generally speaks of productive forces and mode of production rather than of technology? Is Professor Hansen on solid ground when he claims that Engels follows Marx in the technological interpretation, because he, Engels, holds that the mode of production and of exchange is the ultimate cause of historic events?

In the typical and well-known passages where Marx and Engels formulate their theory of history, the mode of production or the material productive forces are advanced as the foundation of all other phases of social existence. In the preface to the *Critique of Political Economy*, where he gives the best-known statement of the theory, Marx declares:

In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production (*Produktionsverhältnisse*) correspond to a definite stage of development of their *material forces of production* (*Produktionskräfte*). The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society — the real foundation on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The *mode of production* (*Produktionsweise*) in material life determines (*bedingt*) the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life.¹

Engels announces in *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*:²

The materialist conception of history starts from the proposition that the *production* of the means to support human life and, next to production, the exchange of things produced, is the basis of all social structure. . . . From this point of view the final causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought . . . in changes in the *modes of production* and exchange.

What did Marx and Engels intend, then, to denote, first, by the mode of production, and second, by productive forces?

Marx analyzes production in the first volume of *Capital*.³ "The labor-process or the production of use-values" is the means of gaining the material requirements of life. Man can satisfy his needs for existence by wrestling with nature, appropriating her

¹ *Critique of Political Economy*, p. 11. Italics are mine.

² Page 45. Italics are mine.

³ Ch. 7, section 1, pp. 197-206.

products, changing the form of matter obtained from her, and transporting the goods from place to place—for roads and canals are “necessary for carrying on the labor-process.”¹ Thus production is an undertaking which creates form and place utilities. In primitive days the reaction between man and nature was simple: man used his own limbs as instruments for procuring wild fruit and herbs. Later, the process of production became complicated, roundabout, since raw materials and implements had to be prepared first. But at all times, “The elementary factors of the labor-process are (1) the personal activity of man, that is, work itself; (2) the object (*Gegenstand*) of that work; and (3), its instruments.”² This reminds one of the “trinitarian formula,” labor, land, capital. However, Marx gives his factors somewhat different meanings.

That Marx counts labor as a vital agency in production everyone knows. Nothing has value unless “fermented” with labor. Living labor must seize upon natural resources and “rouse them from their death-sleep, change them from mere possible use-values into real and effective ones. Bathed in the fire of labor, appropriated as part and parcel of labor’s organism,” they can become use-values, means of subsistence, or means of further production.³

Labor, Marx says, is the activity of man, the expenditure of brain, muscle, and nerve. The laborer starts, regulates, and controls the material reactions between himself and nature; exerts his bodily organs, arms and legs, head and hands. He is not, like the spider, controlled by instincts in his work; he knows what products he needs, plans his work, and sees the result in his imagination before the labor-process has started. He calls into action reason and cunning in his contest with nature.⁴

Labor directs its energies upon the second factor, the object of labor (*Arbeitsgegenstand*). By this Marx understands “all those

¹ Page 201.

² Page 198. The English translation has “subject” for *Gegenstand*. “Object” is more appropriate. The French translation has *l’objet*: see G. Deville’s edition of *Capital* (Paris, 1897), p. 112.

³ *Capital*, vol. i, 204.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

things which labor merely separates from immediate connection with their environment," and which "are spontaneously provided by Nature," as fish, water, timber in the virgin forests, and ores. When labor has been applied to such objects, we have as a result raw materials. The raw material may constitute the principal substance of a product, as seeds, cotton, yarn; or it may enter into the formation of the product merely as an accessory, that is, it may be consumed in the process, like coal and oil; or it may serve to modify the principal raw material, like chlorine applied to unbleached linen, or dye-stuff to wool; or it may merely help to carry on the work, as lighting and heating the workshop.¹

The third factor, the instrument of labor, "is a thing or a complex of things which the laborer interposes between himself and the object of his labor, and which serves as the conductor of his activity. He makes use of the mechanical, physical, and chemical properties of some substances in order to make other substances subservient to his aims."² Some instruments aid in directly transferring the energy of labor to its objects. Such are stones employed by primitive man in throwing, grinding, pressing, cutting; the earth as the instrument in agriculture; domestic animals, bred and tamed by man; and wood, bones, shells, applied as conductors in various labor processes. Another class of instruments comprises things otherwise necessary in production, such as the earth furnishing the *locus standi*, workshops, roads, canals, tubes, baskets, buildings, furnaces.³

The instruments together with the object of labor constitute what Marx terms the objective factor, the "means of production." "If we examine the whole process from the point of view of its result, the product, it is plain that both the instruments and the object of labor are means of production."⁴

It is evident that to Marx instruments connote something larger than what the word technique commonly suggests; animals, earth, buildings, roads, canals are included. The term "means of production" is even more inclusive, for it embraces not only in-

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 199, 202-203.

² *Ibid.*, p. 199.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 200-201, 682.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

struments, but the objects of labor as well, that is, raw material (coal, oil, cotton) and auxiliaries (fuel, dye-stuffs).

But even the concept of technique does not stand in Marx's mind for instruments alone. He makes it clear that technique, at least as it is employed in modern industry, is closely allied with discoveries, inventions, and scientific achievements. Technique and science are intimately bound up with each other. The modern bourgeoisie, in its emphasis on elaborate technical devices and apparatus, is the great employer of science. Already at the dawn of capitalism the nascent middle class realized the indispensability of science. Engels says: "the bourgeoisie, for the development of its industrial production, required a science which ascertained the physical properties of natural objects and the modes of action of the forces of Nature"; and, he continues, since science at that time rebelled against the stultifying restrictions of the Church, the bourgeoisie joined science in its fight against Catholicism.¹

The alliance has been more pronounced since the beginning of the second era of capitalism.² When in England, Marx tells us, the market expanded so much that hand labor no longer sufficed to satisfy the demand, the need for machinery was felt, and then commenced the intensive application of science which had been ready to hand since the eighteenth century.³ Modern industry, with its vast employment of machinery and its intricate processes, is, in its technological aspects, essentially a scientific enterprise. The machine, he teaches, eliminates the rule of thumb and necessitates the introduction of science at every step.⁴ The elaborate hierarchy of operations, steps, and details; their succession, interdependence, and coördination — are problems proposed, analyzed, and determined by mechanics and chemistry, by "the whole range of the natural sciences."⁵ The whole scheme of capitalistic pro-

¹ Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. xx.

² Marx divides capitalism into two eras: the first, which he terms manufacture, lasted from the dissolution of feudalism to the coming of the Industrial Revolution; the second era began with the Industrial Revolution. More will be said about this later.

³ *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 152.

⁴ *Capital*, vol. i, 421.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 415, 504.

duction is therefore transformed "into a technological application of science."¹ It is an incorporation of the stupendous physical forces and the natural sciences; it amalgamates coöperative labor of the physical kind with the "universal labor of the human mind," that is, "scientific labor, such as discoveries and inventions," accumulated by the efforts of the present generation, and from the legacies of the past.² To Marx, technique is inseparably connected with science.

Marx slights the fourth factor of production, the entrepreneur, but he understands perfectly well the nature of his functions. The labor process calls into operation the hand and the head. The two were used by the same person in the days when the artisan worked for himself. But when, under capitalism, the roundabout, complex mode of production is brought into being; when vast masses of laborers collaborate under one roof, the worker becomes an automaton, while "the knowledge, the judgment, the will," and the intelligence are transferred to, and concentrated in, the capitalist.³ Whenever a large body of individuals coöperate, a "directing authority," a "commanding will" is required to organize the labyrinthal division of labor, to adjust and apportion the multitude of tasks, and to secure unity and connection by blending the processes into a coördinated whole. This "directing, superintending, and adjusting" constitutes part of the work of the capitalist. He is the general on the field of battle, the director of the orchestra.⁴ In addition, he supervises or attends himself to the purchasing of appliances and materials and to the hiring of labor; he sees that the proper quality is selected, that the work is performed efficiently, that there is no waste in the factors of production; and he studies the market in order to sell profitably.⁵ Marx is wavering, however, on the question of rewarding the capitalist for his pains. At times he denies him any title to a return, and fights off his claim with sophistry, sarcasm, and circular reasoning. At other moments he is more lenient, but he decrees

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 684.

² *Ibid.*, vol. i, 422, and vol. iii, 124.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. i, 557, 396-397.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. i, 363, and vol. iii, 451.

⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. i, 205-206, 219, 337.

that "wages of superintendence" go to the hired managers — for Marx has changed his mind: they, and not the capitalist employer, perform all the duties of supervising, controlling, and leading.¹

The mode of production is not synonymous, then, with technique. The concept is much wider; it subsumes the ensemble of three agencies, man, nature, technique. A given system of production is defined not only by the type of instruments employed, but also by the peculiarities of the other two factors. Moreover, as will be seen in the subsequent argument, one régime of production will be superseded by another, not solely when the instruments have undergone a change, but also when alterations have occurred in the form of labor or in the geographical surroundings. In other words, production is not a function of technique only, as Professor Sombart would have it,² but of labor and of land as well.

Thus the general nature of the laborer and the grouping of the workers in a scheme of division and of coöperation of labor characterize a mode of production and exert a potent influence on it. The skilled laborer, for example, is the basis of the system of production prevalent in the so-called manufacturing period; and Marx points out that one of the greatest obstacles to the fullest development of this form of production was the insubordination of the worker who knew that all depended on his skill.³ Economic production is fostered or fettered by the traits of the worker. "Apart from the degree of development, greater or less, in the form of social production, the productiveness of labor is fettered by physical conditions. These are all referable to the constitution of man himself (race, etc.) and to surrounding nature."⁴ Engels refers to division of labor as "that instrument of production, the mightiest up to the time of the introduction of the greater industry."⁵ Likewise with coöperation of labor. The productive

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 213-215, 364-365, and vol. iii, 455-457.

² See p. 5, above.

³ *Capital*, vol. i, 403.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 562.

⁵ *Landmarks of Scientific Socialism. Anti-Dühring*, p. 238. Hereafter this work will be referred to, briefly, as *Anti-Dühring*.

power of social labor is declared to be greater, because "When the laborer coöperates systematically with others, he strips off the fetters of his individuality, and develops the capabilities of his species."¹ Coöperation and division of labor are taken by Marx as the general causes of the productiveness of labor.²

It is to be admitted that passages like these, dealing as they do with the productiveness of labor, are hardly conclusive when the point at issue is the concept of the mode of production. Yet they should not be wholly disregarded. In the first place, they indicate in a general way that Marx was aware of the diverse elements that figure in production, and that technical appliances had not taken sole possession of his mind. In the second place, the degree of productivity plays an effective part in his theory; for greater productiveness means greater surplus-value, and therefore greater accumulation and concentration of capital, greater preponderance of the "constant" over the "variable" elements of capital, a greater reserve army, and therefore a speedier and more certain development of the forces that effect the extirpation of the present mode of production and the institution of socialism. In some cases greater productiveness of labor directly implies a change in the system of production. For example, to double the productiveness of the shoemaker per unit of time, and not through the prolongation of the working day, and thereby to make him yield more surplus value, implies "an alteration in his tools or in his mode of working, or in both. Hence, the conditions of production, that is, his mode of production, and the labor-process itself, must be revolutionized. . . . The technical and social conditions of the process, and consequently the very mode of production must be revolutionized, before the productiveness of labor can be increased."³

Furthermore, a régime of production not only is earmarked by the type and the grouping of the laborers, but is also subject to a radical transformation when a change occurs in their organization. Marx makes observations like the following:

Even without an alteration in the system of working, the simultaneous employment of a large number of laborers effects a revolution in the material

Capital, vol. i, 361.

² *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 754.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. i, 345.

conditions of the labor-process.¹ . . . The guilds of the middle ages therefore tried to prevent by force the transformation of the master of a trade into a capitalist, by limiting the number of laborers that could be employed by one master within a very small maximum . . . merely quantitative differences beyond a certain point pass into qualitative changes.²

“In manufacture, the revolution in the mode of production begins with the labor-power,”³ and “manufacture thoroughly revolutionizes” the mode of working by introducing detailed division of labor.⁴ Discussing the distinctive features of capitalism he declares: “. . . the form of labor, as wage-labor, determines the shape of the entire process and the specific mode of production itself.”⁵

It is clear that labor and its organization have a good deal to do with a mode of production and its vicissitudes. The same is true of the second agency in the labor-process, the object of labor. Here we deal with nature, since all the elements that are comprised in this agency are natural resources.

Nature furnishes the matter on which labor can direct its efforts, physical and mental. The earth is “the original field of activity of labor,” “the realm of natural forces,” “the preëxisting armory of all objects of labor.”⁶ It is man’s larder as well as his “original tool house.” It furnishes the means of production — the object of labor and instruments, to remind ourselves of the Marxian terminology. For, “just as in the beginning, the only participators in the labor-process were man and the earth . . . so even now we still employ in the process many means of production, provided directly by nature, that do not represent any combination of natural substances with human labor.”⁷ Nature in general is considered by Marx as an indispensable source of wealth. His first criticism of the Gotha program submitted to him for approval was that it emphasized labor as the dominant element in production, and therefore as the only source of wealth. “Labor is not the source of all wealth,” he objected: “Nature is just as much the source . . . as is labor.”⁸ On another occasion he affirms that, if the labor expended on commodities is subtracted,

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 355.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 337-338, 362.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 405.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 396.

⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 1028.

⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 961.

⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. i, 199, 204.

⁸ Translation in *International Socialist Review*, vol. viii (1907-1908), p. 643.

“a material substratum is always left, which is furnished by Nature without the help of man. . . . As William Petty puts it, labor is its [wealth’s] father and the earth its mother.”¹

The peculiarities of Nature’s resources determine the scope and character of the technical methods employed and at times force a change in the instruments themselves. “It was partly the want of streams with a good fall on them, and partly their battles with superabundance of water in other respects, that compelled the Dutch to resort to wind as a motive power.”² On the contrary, in England the wind was “too inconstant and uncontrollable”; therefore water-power was used. And since this, too, was beset with difficulties, people were stimulated to investigate the “scientific and technical elements” of production.³

Differences in natural resources, or variations in their supply, have, moreover, a notable effect on the productiveness of labor, and even entail alterations in the mode of production. “The productivity of labor,” says Marx, “is also conditioned on natural premises. . . . Consider, for instance, the mere influence of the seasons, on which the greater part of the raw material depends for its mass, the exhaustion of forests, coal and iron mines, etc.”⁴ And he generalizes that productiveness of labor is fettered by “external physical conditions,” which “fall into two great economic classes: (1) natural wealth in means of subsistence, that is, a fruitful soil, waters teeming with fish, etc.; and (2) natural wealth in instruments of labor, such as waterfalls, navigable rivers, wood, metal, coal, etc. At the dawn of civilization it is the first class that turns the scale; at a higher stage of development it is the second.”⁵ “Different communities,” he urges, “find different means of production⁶ and different means of subsistence in their natural environment. Hence their mode of production and of living and their products are different.”⁷ It is likely, however,

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 50.

² *Ibid.*, p. 409 n.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 411-412.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 305.

⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. i, 562. Note that Marx changes his terminology: wood, metal, coal are objects of labor and not instruments of labor.

⁶ And, again, means of production refer both to the objects of labor and to instruments.

⁷ *Capital*, vol. i, 386.

that he had in mind primitive or backward communities. It is doubtful whether he would insist that, even in modern times, differences in natural wealth will result in different productive systems, for he must have known that developed means of communication and an extensive system of international trade would minimize the effect of such barriers.¹

That the third factor, technique, is a prominent characteristic of a system of production is clear from previous discussion. A radical reorganization of the technical appliances and procedures will change the nature of a mode of production. The distinguishing mark of the second phase of capitalism, which followed upon the Industrial Revolution, is, in Marx's view, the pervasive employment of machinery.

It may be remarked here, parenthetically, that Marx views changes in the character of labor and technique as occurring historically, that is, in time; while differences in natural resources, climate, and the like, he envisages as appearing in space. Marx did not take account of theorems such as Professor Ellsworth Huntington has since advanced, to the effect that climatic phenomena, too, are subject to secular changes.

It would be misleading, however, to ascribe to Marx and Engels the view that a mode of production is a clear-cut function of one or more of the three factors, and that, therefore, as soon as a factor is altered, the mode of production is automatically recast. Marx, it should be remembered, was a strong adherent of a form of the doctrine of relativity. An event, a factor, cannot of its own power achieve transformations in the economic order: it must harmonize with other events, it must permit of blending with the other factors. There is the indispensable prerequisite of an ensemble of elements creating a *milieu* in which the new arrival can thrive and make its influence manifest.

Thus division of labor is the chief characteristic of the mode of production in the manufacturing period; but division of labor could not have established itself firmly if it had not been for the chain of historical occurrences that Marx terms "primitive accumulation," and discusses in a chapter with that title in the first

¹ Cf. Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 244.

volume of his *Capital*. The part nature plays is likewise contingent upon other circumstances. It is true, indeed, that if nature is niggardly and does not allow the laborer a degree of productiveness which will leave him a surplus above his needs, there can be no phenomenon of surplus-labor, "and therefore no capitalists, no slave-owners, no feudal lords, in one word, no class of large proprietors. Thus we may say that surplus-value rests on a natural basis."¹ But no; nature can furnish the "possibility, never the reality, of surplus-labor, nor, consequently, of surplus-value and a surplus product." Favorable natural conditions augment the productiveness of labor, but this productiveness is also dependent on a certain development of man and on his knowledge in contending with nature; and surplus-value, in its turn, predicates the operation of forces that compel one man to surrender his surplus-labor to another. "Capital with its accompanying relations springs up from an economic soil that is the product of a long process of development. The productiveness of labor that serves as its foundation and starting-point is a gift, not of nature, but of a history embracing thousands of centuries."²

Similarly, to assert that technique is the prime mover of the organization of a productive system is to fly in the face of the cardinal tenet in Marx's social philosophy. It is true that he considers the machine as the basis of modern capitalism. But this does not mean that technique alone can compel a change in a mode of production. It can achieve such an end only if the other factors permit it. Marx acknowledges that "The inventions of Vaucanson, Arkwright, Watt, and others were, however, practicable only because those inventors found, ready to hand, a considerable number of skilled mechanical workmen, placed at their disposal by the manufacturing period."³ If technique and a mode of production were synonymous, the arrival in a given country of new technical inventions ought to signal a transformation in the productive régime. Yet Marx points to "the invention nowadays of machines in England that are employed only in North America; just as in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries machines were invented in Germany to be used only in Holland, and just as many

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 561.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 561-564.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 417.

a French invention of the eighteenth century was exploited in England alone.”¹

A machine cannot introduce capitalism unless capitalism fits into the general situation. Marx emphasizes this idea when he says: “A negro is a negro. In certain conditions he is transformed into a slave. A spinning jenny is a machine for spinning cotton. Only under certain circumstances does it become capital. Outside these circumstances it is no more capital than gold is intrinsically money, or sugar is the price of sugar.”² A man may possess money, means of subsistence, machines, and other requisites of production. But this will not stamp him as a capitalist unless there is “the correlative — the wage-worker, the other man who is compelled to sell himself of his own free will.” If every direct producer had his own machinery and other appliances, society, according to Marx, would not thereby become capitalistic. Only when the means of production are owned by those who do not work, and only as they are employed for the exploitation and the subjection of the propertyless laborers, is there a capitalistic form of production.³ “The separation of labor from its product, of subjective labor-power from the objective conditions of labor, was therefore the real foundation in fact, and the starting-point of capitalist production.”⁴

By production Marx comprehends something of still wider scope, for he is aware that it has interrelations with other economic functions, as consumption, distribution, and exchange. He discusses this aspect in an incomplete sketch, very abstruse and obscure, published long after his death.⁵ In the early part of this sketch he accords little significance to these economic functions in their relation to production. He begins by indicating that in some respects there is an interaction between production and consumption. Wants furnish the impulse to production; while

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 429.

² *Wage-Labor and Capital*, p. 28. Cf. *Capital*, vol. iii, 948.

³ *Capital*, vol. i, 839-840, and vol. iii, 207.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. i, 624-625.

⁵ *Neue Zeit*, vol. xxi, no. 1, pp. 710-718, 741-745, 772-781. It is found in English as an appendix to the *Critique of Political Economy*, pp. 265-312.

production, filling the market with multifarious articles, develops the tastes and the demands of the consumers.¹ After discussing a few similar points, he hastens, however, to deprive consumption of any influence on production, and declares that "it is the simplest matter with a Hegelian to treat production and consumption as identical," but in reality they appear as one process, "in which production forms the actual starting-point and is, therefore, the predominating factor. Consumption, as a natural necessity, as a want, constitutes an internal factor of productive activity, but the latter is the starting-point of realization and, therefore, its predominating factor. . . . Consumption thus appears as a factor of production."²

In much the same manner distribution is held to be a creature of production. In the first place, only the fruits of production can be distributed. In the second place, a definite organization of production, a definite manner of grouping the participants in the productive enterprise, provides a framework for the distribution of the resulting products.³ In his criticism of the Gotha program he indicates that it committed an error by emphasizing distribution, since "Under any and all circumstances, the distribution of the means of consumption is but the result of the distribution of the conditions of production, itself."⁴ It may appear, he continues in the sketch, that in some cases distribution antedates and therefore determines production. A conquering people may turn the vanquished into slaves, and establish for itself a mode of production with slave labor as the basis. But, Marx urges, this merely implies that the conquerors introduce, not a new kind of distribution, but rather a new régime of production. Moreover, the mode of production in vogue with the conquerors must have been of such a nature as to admit of slave labor; else the innovation will not endure. Likewise, a revolution may break up large estates into small parcels, or a law may introduce and perpetuate small holdings, and, because of the redistribution of wealth, inaugurate a new organization of production. But, he insists, this

¹ *Critique of Political Economy*, appendix, p. 280.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 282-283.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 286.

⁴ *International Socialist Review*, vol. viii, 650.

will be of no avail, for concentration of land holdings will soon re-establish itself, unless, indeed, the parceling of land is compatible with the existing productive order. In both these cases we do not see a distribution of wealth leading subsequently to new modes of production; we deal rather with a new organization of production, with a new alignment of the agents of the productive processes, which, once in effect, brings about corresponding changes in distribution.¹ Similarly, while Marx holds that, before capitalistic production could be instituted, there had to be an expropriation of laborers on the one hand and a concentration of wealth on the other, he maintains that this is not distribution in the same sense in which he commonly employs the term; and he proceeds to elaborate the point on a few nebulous pages in the third volume of *Capital* (pp. 1024 ff.).

Nor does he at first impute much effect to exchange, be it exchange in the narrow or broad sense, that is, exchange between producers within a city, between town and country, or between distant commercial markets. Exchange is determined by production, "and is itself a species of productive activity. . . . Exchange thus appears in all its aspects to be directly included in or determined by production."²

But he definitely speaks his mind when he summarizes the discussion in this article. Then he changes his tone, and declares that exchange, distribution, and consumption are closely affiliated to production. He begins haltingly, but he concludes on a firm note:

The result we arrive at is not that production, distribution, exchange, and consumption are identical, but that they are all members of one entity, different sides of one unit. Production predominates . . . over the other elements. . . . Of course production . . . is in its turn influenced by other elements; for example, with the expansion of the market, — that is, of the sphere of exchange, — production grows in volume and is subdivided to a greater extent. With a change in distribution, production undergoes a change; as, for example, in the case of concentration of capital. . . .³ Finally, the demands of consumption also influence production. A mutual interaction

¹ *Critique of Political Economy*, appendix, pp. 287–280.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 290–291.

³ Cf. Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 178.

takes place between the various elements. Such is the case with every organic body.¹

Viewed in the light of all the scattered passages in which Marx says anything about the problem, this summary is an accurate statement of his position, except that he ordinarily considers exchange of greater moment than the summary suggests. This point deserves further attention.

Exchange is almost invariably assigned a very prominent rôle in influencing some of the factors of production, in affecting the advent of new economic systems, and in guiding the course of history in general. The nature and extent of the market put a stamp on the division of labor in the different epochs, and furnish the possibility of its development.² Markets and commerce demolish old modes of production and erect new ones.

In the pre-capitalist stages of society, commerce rules industry. The reverse is true of modern society. Of course, commerce will have more or less of a reaction on the societies between which it is carried on . . . it dissolves all old conditions . . . corrodes production itself more and more, making entire lines of production dependent on it. However, this dissolving effect depends to a large degree on the nature of the producing society.³

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the great revolutions in commerce "form one of the principal elements in the transition from feudal to capitalist production"; and the expansion of the markets and the colonial system aided a good deal in establishing the first phase of capitalism, namely, the manufacturing period.⁴ "Meanwhile the markets kept ever growing, the demand, ever rising. Even manufacture no longer sufficed. Thereupon, steam and machinery revolutionized industrial production," introducing the second phase of capitalism.⁵ Even under this latter régime, the bourgeoisie can attain its fullest power only in that country which has conquered for its industry a world market, since the national boundaries are not sufficient for industrial development.⁶ Exchange is held in such esteem that the *Communist Manifesto* couples it with the mode of production as the prime movers of

¹ *Critique of Political Economy*, appendix, pp. 291-292.

² *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 139; *Capital*, vol. i, 388.

³ *Capital*, vol. iii, 389.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 391.

⁵ *Communist Manifesto*, p. 14.

⁶ *Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich*, pp. 31-32.

historical events. So does Engels when, in his condensed formulations of the economic interpretation of history, he points to the foundation of social processes.¹ To him production and exchange "become so mutually involved at a given time and react one upon the other that they might be designated the abscissas and ordinates of the economic curve."²

This concludes the discussion of the concept "mode of production." The result of our inquiry is that the mode of production is an organic whole, representing a combination of three elements; that it will undergo a transformation when a significant variation occurs in the character of one or more of these elements; that they do not constitute disparate items, like so many pebbles in a pile, but are harmoniously related and mutually dependent one upon another; and that, furthermore, a régime of production is in close alliance with distribution, consumption, and particularly exchange. If the analysis is in the main sound, it follows that by "mode of production" Marx intended to denote, not merely the technical methods employed in producing goods, but something vastly more comprehensive. When he urges that the mode of production is the basis of human history, he does not propose a technological theory, but a much broader one.

As we have seen, when indicating the factors that direct the course of civilization and that furnish the key to the understanding of historical processes in all their complexity, Marx names the *productive forces* as frequently as the mode of production. The study of this other concept, therefore, should throw additional light on the question at issue.

In referring to the mode of production and to the productive forces, he does not mean that there are two distinct foundations of history. He is dealing, not with two different entities, but with one thing viewed in different lights. The mode of production is a

¹ *Anti-Dühring*, p. 48 (the English translation has "method of production and distribution"; it should be "production and exchange," since the original gives "*Produktions- und Verkehrsverhältnisse*"); *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, pp. xviii, 41, 45; preface of 1888 to the *Communist Manifesto*.

² *Anti-Dühring*, p. 176.

general term representing a totality of elements that combine to provide for society the means of existence. Productive forces, on the other hand, allude directly to these elements. The one notion has reference to the collective, organic unit; the other, to the parts that go to make it.

The productive forces are the raw material out of which a system of production is fashioned. They give it flesh, blood, and physiognomy. Each régime of production depends for its existence on the development of the prerequisite productive forces. The scientific analysis of capitalism, Marx teaches, demonstrates that its nature and peculiarities are specifically defined by historical development, and "that it, like any other definite mode of production, is conditioned upon a certain stage of social productivity and upon the historically developed form of the forces of production."¹ If the prevailing productive forces are unripe, the resulting form of production is likewise immature. Discussing surplus-labor under serfdom, he remarks that since it "rests upon the imperfect development of all productive powers of society," it yields possibilities for a smaller portion of surplus-labor "than under developed modes of production."² But as soon as the productive forces reach maturity or change their character, a new organization of production does not fail to arrive, and a new social order is instituted. A much-quoted passage states: "In acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production, and in changing their mode of production, their manner of gaining a living, they change all their social relations."³ This is the manner in which capitalism will go under, to cede its place to the triumphant higher order. "The development of the productive forces of social labor is the historical task and privilege of capital. It is precisely in this way that it unconsciously creates the material requirements of a higher mode of production."⁴ Critics and in-

¹ *Capital*, vol. iii, 1023.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 921-922.

³ *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 119.

⁴ *Capital*, vol. iii, 304. That the productive forces furnish the material conditions of a new society, Marx reiterates when he mentions some of the disrupting elements under capitalism: "Let us observe that competition always becomes more destructive of bourgeois relations in proportion as it excites to a feverish creation of new productive forces — that is to say, of the material conditions of a new society."

terpreters of Marx recognize the foremost position that productive forces occupy in his scheme. Professor Barth gives to his discussion of the materialistic interpretation of history the title: "Die Geschichte, gelenkt durch die Produktionskräfte (Marx, Engels, Marxianer)." ¹ Tugan-Baranowsky, when explaining what Marx holds as the basis of history, limits his analysis to a consideration of the productive forces.

What are these far-reaching productive forces? In the preface to the *Critique of Political Economy* Marx offers an account of the motives that in 1843 took him away from his professional studies of jurisprudence, philosophy, and history, and led him to the study of political economy. Among these motives he mentions "the debates between free trade and protection" in Germany. We recall that in those years the renewal of the German Customs Union (*Zollverein*) was under discussion, and that F. List was the chief agitator for protection. In numerous articles and in his *National System* the idea of productive forces was propounded with great vigor. It is likely that Marx borrowed the term from List.² A productive force, in List's view, is any agency, spiritual or material, that aids a nation in the production of material wealth; as religion, government, institutions, transportation, etc.³ Marx eliminates "ideologies" and includes only those elements which, to his mind, are essentially materialistic. A list of some of these is given in the *Communist Manifesto*, where we read:

The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together. Subjection of Nature's forces to man, machinery,

Poverty of Philosophy, pp. 163-164. "Hence the credit system accelerates the material development of the forces of production and the establishment of a world market. To bring these material foundations of the new mode of production to a certain degree of perfection, is the historical mission of the capitalist system of production." *Capital*, vol. iii, 522.

¹ *Philosophie der Geschichte als Soziologie*, p. 627.

² Or else, he may have learned of the term later when studying the English socialists and economists. We meet in Adam Smith and Ricardo quite frequently the expression "productive powers." The English socialists, John Gray, for example, employ it, too. That Marx was aware of this is evident from quotations from these men in which the expression occurs. See *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 204; *Capital*, vol. i, 657 n., 681.

³ *National System*, book 2, ch. 2, and *passim*.

application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalization of rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground — what earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labor? ¹

Ridiculing Proudhon, Marx observes that “In so far as Prometheus only informs us of the division of labor, the application of machinery, the exploitation of natural forces and scientific power, multiplying the productive forces of men . . . this new Prometheus has only the misfortune of coming too late.” ²

If we classify these elements, we see that we deal once more with labor, nature, and technique, including science! Productive forces, like modes of production, include not merely technical methods, but other economic factors as well. Scattered utterances support this inference. Thus the first factor, labor, and its organization in the performance of its work, is held to be a productive force or a generator of productive forces. Dilating on the wretched condition of the laborer under capitalism, Marx urges: “His existence has no other value than that of a simple productive force, and the capitalist treats him accordingly.” ³ In *Capital* he states: “We saw that the productive forces resulting from co-operation and division of labor cost capital nothing. They are natural forces of labor.” ⁴ There are similar references to the object of labor, that is, natural resources, and to instruments, termed collectively means of production. Marx indicates that one of the “principal facts of capitalist production” is “concentration of means of production in a few hands, whereby they cease to appear as the property of the immediate laborers and transform themselves into social powers of production.” ⁵ And Engels remarks: “But the bourgeoisie . . . could not transform these puny means of production into mighty productive forces.” ⁶ Likewise, there are statements about the third factor, technique: “Machinery is only a productive force.” ⁷ Just as we saw in the

¹ *Communist Manifesto*, p. 18.

² *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 107.

³ *Free Trade*, reprinted as an appendix to *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 224.

⁴ *Capital*, vol. i, 422.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

⁶ *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. 49; also p. 67.

⁷ Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 145.

analysis of the mode of production that with Marx the idea of technique implies scientific achievements, so we discern that he considers science as a productive force. Discussing the transfer of intelligence away from the laborer when at his work, Marx asserts: "It is completed in modern industry, which makes science a productive force distinct from labor, and presses it into the service of capital."¹

Tugan-Baranowsky, who was among the first to emphasize the function of productive forces in Marx's theory and to attempt the analysis of their nature, is of the opinion that Marx, to be consistent, could not have meant by this term any but the material agencies that participate in all the processes of production, beginning with the procuring of raw materials from the earth and ending with the finished product in the hands of the consumer. He insists that science and race should not be included, although he is well aware that both Marx and Engels counted these, particularly science, as influential elements of production.² He argues that science is a spiritual force, and therefore, according to Marx, is not independent but, like every other form of consciousness, is secondary to and derivative from the economic elements. If science is to be regarded as a productive force, the other ideologies, as philosophy, religion, and law, may with equal logic be included also. Likewise with race, he argues. According to the materialistic interpretation of history, race is a resultant of economic forces, and is experiencing variations in consonance with material economic conditions; it is therefore not to be included among the productive forces. To incorporate science and race is to render the materialistic interpretation neither monistic nor materialistic, and to obliterate any distinction between Marx's conception of history and the idealistic pronouncements of his predecessors that he so vehemently decried. If Marx and Engels name race as

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 397.

² Tugan-Baranowsky is hardly correct in holding that Marx and Engels include race as a factor of production: they accord to racial peculiarities only some slight influence in production or in history in general. See *Capital*, vol. i, 562, vol. iii, 919, 922, and Engels's letter, reprinted in Labriola's *Socialisme et philosophie*, p. 259.

an economic factor, they merely demonstrate that the founders themselves can be disloyal to their theory.¹

In my opinion, Tugan-Baranowsky's reasoning is correct, but not his conclusion. A person who propounds a materialistic and monistic philosophy of history cannot include science and race as important factors without defying logical consistency; he must limit himself to one primary and material agent, and consider the others as secondary and derivative. But is Tugan-Baranowsky's conclusion valid that, for the sake of consistency on the part of Marx, we ought to forget what Marx says and conclude that he meant by productive forces only material elements of production, like natural resources, climate, means of communication, technical appliances? It seems to me that it is not. Marx states unequivocally that science is a productive force, and stresses times without number the intimate alliance of technique and technical development with science and scientific progress. To him modern industry is scientific industry. With him science plays an enormous part in the exploitation of labor, in the accumulation of capital, in the changes of the composition of the constant and variable parts of capital, and in the concentration of industry — forces which, according to his theory, have a disruptive influence on capitalism and lead it to ultimate destruction. Kautsky interprets Marx well when he says:

The development of natural science goes hand in hand with the development of technique, in the widest sense of the term. By the technical development of a given period we ought not to understand merely instruments and machines. Modern methods of chemical research and modern mathematics form integral parts of the existing technique. Just try to build a steamship or a railroad bridge without mathematics! Without present-day mathematics capitalist society would be impossible. The present state of mathematics belongs to the economic conditions of existing society as well as the present state of machine technique or of world commerce. They are all most intimately connected with one another.²

It is better for an interpreter of Marx and Engels to present the facts as he finds them, and not to tamper with their ideas so as to render them more consistent and reasonable. Marx pretends to

¹ M. Tugan-Baranowsky, *Marxismus*, pp. 4 ff.

² *Neue Zeit*, vol. xv, no. 1, p. 234.

offer a materialistic interpretation of history. Yet he frequently emphasizes the potency of science in modern technique and production in general, and mentions race as an independent economic factor. True, it may be regarded as illogical to include these two elements, especially science. Marx may as well incorporate all other non-economic forces. But for this weakness Marx is responsible; and the interpreter is to point out the inconsistency, but he is not to remove it. A slight amount of adjusting is at times indispensable, for Marx is frequently hopelessly intricate and contradictory. But reiterated statements of his cannot be ignored. Once the interpreter assumes the task of remodeling Marx's ideas, he will hardly know where to call a halt. For example, Tugan-Baranowsky maintains that Marx must have meant by productive forces only material factors involved in production. Would Tugan-Baranowsky call division of labor, co-operation of labor, and organization of labor in general, material factors? Yet with Marx, it is precisely these factors that mark the advent of capitalism, and that characterize the system of production during the first capitalistic phase — as Tugan-Baranowsky himself points out when he takes a stand against the view that Marx regards technique as the primary force in history.¹

To return to the main theme, it is evident that the examination of productive forces yields results similar to those obtained from the analysis of the mode of production. But there is yet another valuable source which sheds light on what Marx considers the basis of social life. Marx and Engels did more than propound theories. They also assumed the rôle of historians and outlined and pronounced judgment on events in the past. Marx's *Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich, 18th Brumaire, Revolution and Counter-Revolution, Civil War in France*, and Engels's *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, are examples of their historical work; so are numerous brief passages and whole chapters scattered here and there as illustrations or digressions. When assembled and arranged, these writings present an account of the series of productive systems that have prevailed from the dawn of his-

¹ Tugan-Baranowsky, *Marxismus*, pp. 8-9.

tory to the present day. The treatment of the elements that brought about transformations of old modes of production into new ones, initiating historical epochs and changing man's destinies, demonstrates concretely what the authors have in mind when they pronounce the mode of production or the productive forces as the fundamental cause of civilization.

To give an outline of this account would be to digress too far at this point.¹ But we may summarize here, by way of anticipation, the inferences that can be drawn from it, and that are pertinent to the main argument. Only in one case is the discovery and perfection of new ways of producing articles made to explain, and even then only partially, the transition from one form of production to another. That case is the disintegration of barbarism and the advent of civilization with the slave régime, as in classical antiquity. But from that time on till the present day, productive orders appear to have succeeded one another without the intervention of a new technique as the governing cause. The transition from the slave order to the feudal was not effected by the arrival of technical discoveries and the employment of new instruments. Marx and Engels nowhere urge that the feudal productive organization differed from that under slavery because of divergent technical procedures employed in the making of commodities. Likewise, feudalism went under and capitalistic production was established because of the pressure of other forces than technique. Only after two hundred years of capitalism, when its "second phase" began with the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century, machinery begins to play a dominant part. But this new technique failed to usher in a new mode of production; it merely marked the commencement of a new phase of capitalism, termed modern industry.

Beginning, then, with ancient slavery, down to the end of the eighteenth century there is no mention of technique as the chief characteristic of a mode of production or as the main cause of the transition from one mode to another. One productive régime after another receives its initial impetus, not from technique, but from the other elements that go to constitute a system of produc-

¹ See below, pp. 45-62.

tion. Will it be different with the accession of the socialist order? What technological novelties will proclaim the dawn of the new era? None. The *Communist Manifesto* enumerates the measures which "are unavoidable as a means of entirely revolutionizing the mode of production" in order to pave the road to socialism. It names ten, but there is no mention of a newly adopted or a newly discovered technique. Instead, emphasis is put on significant changes in the status of labor, in the credit system, and in the distribution of wealth.¹ Engels teaches that under socialism "The old methods of production must be completely revolutionized and the old form of division of labor must be done away with, above all." In the elaboration upon this idea he fails to talk of mechanical devices. He specifies that everybody will have to work, that the work day will be much shorter, that the division of labor between town and country will be obliterated. In order to render the work less irksome, he continues, the worker will be educated to become more versatile, to shift from process to process and from machine to machine, instead of staying riveted to one task; and so forth.²

The idea recurs frequently that socialism will rest on a thoroughly new form of production,³ but nowhere does Marx or Engels say that important mechanical changes will mark its arrival. The watchword of the socialists is not a new technique. Their battle-cry is rather the abolition of private property. The same *Manifesto* declares: "The theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property."⁴ The goal of socialism is not the relegation of capitalistic technique to the rubbish heap and the inauguration of new mechanical appliances; the goal is rather the full utilization by a coöperative society of all the productive forces already developed within capitalism. In the preface to *Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich* Engels indicates that in chapter two Marx offers a formula which states briefly the workers' "demand for the economic reorganization."

¹ *Communist Manifesto*, pp. 41-42.

² *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 240-245.

³ E. g., *Feuerbach*, p. 112; *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 180, 183; *Capital*, vol. iii, 713.

⁴ *Communist Manifesto*, p. 31.

The formula in question reads: “. . . appropriation of the means of production, their subjection to the associated working class, therefore the abrogation of wage-labor, of capital, and of their reciprocal relations.”¹ In 1894 Engels writes: “. . . Its [socialism’s] task is only the transfer of the means of production to the producers as *common property*.”²

Such is the evidence. On the one hand, certain citations from Marx and Engels, and to some small extent their discussion of the transition from barbarism to civilization, seem to indicate that they make technique the basis of all social phenomena. On the other hand, an examination of their ideas of production and of productive forces, as well as a study of their historical account of the various modes of production, point unmistakably to a larger view of the underlying causes of history. Of these two views, which one is to be chosen?

It would be better to keep both in mind. There is no reason why any evidence should be neglected. What Marx and Engels clearly state ought not be forgotten. But if a choice has to be made, the light of the evidence and the spirit of their writings appear to give the broader interpretation primacy over the technological. What they had in mind is reflected more faithfully in passages like the following than in quotations dealing with “instruments”:

This productiveness is determined by various circumstances — amongst others, by the average amount of skill among the workmen, the state of science, and the degree of its practical application, the social organization of production, the extent and capabilities of the means of production, and by physical conditions.³

This is Marx’s and Engels’s way of viewing the historical picture. When seeking the silent forces that control history, they do not look up to the universal Reason or Idea, to spiritual elements, to “great men,” or to institutions. They focus their attention on

¹ *Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich*, pp. 10, 51.

² “Die Bauernfrage in Frankreich und Deutschland,” in *Neue Zeit*, vol. 13, no. 1, p. 298. The italics are Engels’s. See also his *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, pp. 72, 86, and *Anti-Dühring*, p. 181.

³ *Capital*, vol. 1, 47; cf. *Value, Price, and Profits*, p. 64.

humbler phenomena. To sustain themselves, men must come to terms with nature, for she does not provide them gratuitously with all the necessaries of life. They have to wrestle with their natural environment and to organize the available energies that will aid in the undertaking. The result is a system of production characterized by various agencies: labor, with its peculiarities, including race characteristics, with its régime of division and co-operation; land, that is, natural resources and climatic conditions; technique, comprising instruments, mechanical devices, and scientific processes. All these constitute an organic whole, affiliated with, and influenced by, the prevalent type of distribution and consumption of wealth, and especially by the expansion and contraction of the market. It is the manner in which men organize production in order to procure the material requirements of life that determines the particular nature of their relations and groupings, their institutions and ideas. And to him who seeks to learn the underlying, moving forces of phenomena in a given society Marx would say: study the peculiar phases of the various factors composing its productive order; *in hoc signo vinces*.¹

But, some will protest, Marx and Engels intended to enunciate a monistic and materialistic view of history, and this one is neither, since it comprises more than one factor, and since it includes science. True, such was their intention. But it appears that they did not succeed.

Some hold that Engels's version of the theory differs from Marx's view, because Marx emphasizes production alone, while Engels ordinarily employs the expression "production and exchange." This can hardly be allowed. We have seen that commerce and markets play a prominent part with Marx also. In the *Communist Manifesto* the word production is always coupled with the word exchange, and this document was a product of joint authorship, as Marx himself testified.² Again, with the exception of the *Origin of the Family*, Marx read in manuscript everything

¹ It would be premature to discuss at this juncture the question whether Marx, in any way, takes into account other forces of civilization than the mode of production. This question receives treatment later, in Chapter XIV, pp. 270-274.

² Preface to the *Critique of Political Economy*, p. 14.

written by Engels, and had he noticed a divergence from his views, he would have reacted in no uncertain manner. Marx was not one to brook opposition in respect of doctrines on the part of any of his followers.

Engels apparently does add something. According to him, the foundation of society in prehistoric epochs is not so much production as the organization of the family. In the preface to his *Origin of the Family*, written soon after Marx's death, he states that the decisive force in history is, on the one hand, "the production of the means of existence; . . . on the other hand, the generation of children, the propagation of the species. . . . The less labor is developed . . . the more society is seen to be under the domination of sexual ties."¹ This idea we do not find in Marx's writings. But we cannot be certain. Perhaps it was contained in the notes Marx had jotted down on prehistoric society, to some of which Engels refers.

¹ *Origin of the Family*, pp. 9-10.

CHAPTER III

THE DIALECTIC

THE discussion thus far has been concerned with what Marx and Engels take to be the mainspring of social phenomena principally in a static state. But the two writers go further and indicate also the dynamic forces that change one mode of production into another, engendering transmutations of social systems, and assuring history of an uninterrupted march toward a final goal. One of the cardinal tenets of their philosophy is their theory of societal evolution and historical progress. The pervasive power instinct in all phenomena, and controlling their steady development and their never-ceasing flow from one state into another, is the dialectic. The dialectic is the law of evolution discernible in all domains: in nature, society, and human thought.¹ All phenomena proceed in their progress of growth on the basis of contradictions; on the premises of thesis, antithesis, synthesis. Nothing enjoys a perpetual existence; everything passes away, yielding its place to higher orders. Everything is born in the storm and stress of oppositions, is impregnated with disharmonies, breeds on contradictions, thrives on antagonisms, and dies of antitheses.

All reality bears witness to the incessant and ubiquitous operation of the dialectic. In his polemic against Dühring, Engels undertakes the task of drawing convincing illustrations from phenomena of all realms. He had not in vain, he assures us, made "a complete mathematical and scientific molting . . . and spent the best part of eight years on it." These years of study enabled him to "follow Herr Dühring over a wide expanse of country where he had dealt with everything under the sun, yea and more also," and to prove that his adversary is one of those "absurd pseudo-scientists" who propound noisy nonsense.²

¹ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 173.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 30, 24-25.

As soon, he announces, as we commence to regard facts and occurrences, not as static, but in their life and in their mutually reciprocal relations, we come upon antitheses or "contradictions" residing within each one of them. Motion is a contradiction, because it implies that a body is "at one and the same moment in one place and simultaneously in another place by being in one and the same place and yet not there." Life itself means that the living creature is at one and the same time itself and something different, and "as soon as the contradiction ceases life also ceases, death comes on the scene." Even mathematics cannot escape contradictions. Differential calculus demonstrates, "in spite of all the protests of common sense, that under certain conditions straight and crooked are identical." It is a contradiction that a root of a quantity should be a power of it; yet $\sqrt{a} = a^{\frac{1}{2}}$. It is a contradiction that the square of any number should give us a negative magnitude; however, $(\sqrt{-1})^2 = -1$. "Where would mathematics, higher or lower, be if one were forbidden to operate with $\sqrt{-1}$? Mathematics itself enters the realm of the dialectic, and significantly enough it was a dialectic philosopher, Descartes, who introduced this progressiveness into mathematics." The reason mathematicians fail to recognize sufficiently the greatness of the dialectic is that they insist on operating "in the antiquated, limited, metaphysical fashion" with the methods disclosed by means of the dialectic; and the reason Dühring's view is different consists in the fact that he is beclouded with metaphysical notions.¹

The negation of the negation, or the synthesis, is equally prolific, Engels assures us. It is a very simple process fulfilling itself every day, and any child can understand it. A grain of barley falls on the ground, and under the influence of heat and moisture it begins to germinate. The grain disappears, it is negated; but in its stead appears a plant, the negation of the grain. This plant grows, ripens, and dies away. By virtue of this negation of the negation, it leaves a progeny of 10, 20, or 30 grains of barley instead of the original single one. This is as it should be, for the new synthesis is always of a higher order than the old thesis.

¹ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 150-153.

Similarly, the insects go out of the egg through a negation of the egg; they copulate at maturity, die after copulation, but leave behind them still more eggs. So much for botany and zoölogy. All geology is likewise a series of negated negations, because the old layers are destroyed, serving as building material for the new layers that arrive.

In mathematics, negate a given quantity A , and we obtain $-A$; negate this negation, that is, multiply it by itself, and we obtain $-A \times -A = A^2$. Behold the original positive quantity, but now in a higher synthesis! The negated negation is wrought with such thoroughness in A^2 , boasts Engels, that "under all circumstances" it has two roots, A and $-A$. Differentiate x and y functionally related. Then $\frac{dy}{dx} = \frac{0}{0}$, that is, x and y have vanished, have been negated, and only "a quantitative relation without any quantity" is left. Now "calculate further" with these "formulae or equations," treat dy and dx as real quantities subject "to certain exceptional laws," and "at a certain point" negate the negation, or integrate (*sic*). We have then $\int dx = x$ and $\int dy = y$. To be sure, we arrive at no synthesis of a higher order, since the result is merely the former x and y ; but Engels is not dismayed. He consoles himself saying: "but I have thereby solved the problem over which ordinary geometry and algebra would probably have gnashed their teeth in vain." As a matter of fact, the mathematics of variable quantities is "substantially nothing but the application of the dialectic in mathematics."¹

Nor is philosophy immune from the dialectic. Ancient philosophy began with materialism. This was negated, centuries later, by idealism; and two thousand years later the synthesis emerged with modern materialism.² History and economic phenomena also succumb to this law.³

It may be objected, Engels continues, that we also negate a grain when we grind it, and an insect when we crush it. But this

¹ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 165-169. For another interesting morsel of calculus see *Der Briefwechsel zwischen F. Engels und K. Marx*, vol. iv, 434-436.

² Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 170.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 169-170; Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 165.

objection, he contends, is worthy only of the idiotic, metaphysical manner of reasoning. To negate, dialectically speaking, does not mean to destroy. We must not only negate, but also take care that the negation is restored, and in a higher and more perfect form. We are to proceed cautiously. We must "so direct the first negation" as to create the opportunity for a second negation; therefore the procedure will vary with the requirements of each case. And if Dühring desires to expel the dialectic from the process of thought, he will have to invent, Engels threatens, a system of mathematics where $-A$ multiplied by itself does not give A^2 , and where differential and integral calculus are forbidden by law.¹

It is this dialectic which governs the transmutation of one productive system into another without the intervention of any spiritual forces.² Both the static and the dynamic aspects of social phenomena find their basis and their causes in material elements. A given system of production is established by society in conformity with the prevailing productive forces which form its constituent parts. In consonance with this system, there arises a given complex of property and other relations among the agents participating in the labor-process, and a definite aggregate of particular arrangements and customs. The productive forces continue to develop, and the mode of production, as well as the attending relations and arrangements, grow and undergo modifications accordingly. But this harmony does not endure. Sooner or later a point is reached when the régime of production and its corresponding *milieu* of personal relations and institutional fixtures become conservative, solidified, and self-perpetuating, imparting to society a mature and permanent complexion.³ But not so with the productive forces; they are not subject to ossification. They persist in the process of continual expansion and improvement. Since the solidified régime of production is no longer possessed of

¹ *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 173-175. This, however, does not deter Engels from disobeying his own orders as to the process of negation: he declares, for instance, that the battleship is becoming expensive, and will therefore have to be abandoned, demonstrating that the dialectic law is at work and leads to the annihilation of naval warfare. *Ibid.*, p. 202.

² Other phases of the dialectic will be discussed below, pp. 116-122.

³ *Capital*, vol. iii, 921.

the elasticity which would permit it to embody them and grow with them, a chasm, an "irreconcilable contradiction," is formed between the two. The nascent productive forces require a new soil in which to thrive, but they are constantly impeded in their development by the stultifying environment attendant upon the old order. The existing régime becomes the enemy of progress. It cannot persist; it must be negated by the antithetic element, the unleashed productive forces.

Finally, the solution comes. The old order of production succumbs under the stress, and is disrupted. A different one is instituted, which embodies the newly evolved productive forces. On this fresh basis is erected a new superstructure of corresponding institutions and ideas. A new synthesis has dawned upon mankind. Marx teaches:

At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or . . . with the property relations within which they had been at work before. From forms of development of the forces of production these relations turn into their fetters. Then comes the period of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed.¹

Such is the law to which historical evolution is obedient. The dialectic antithesis introduces alterations in the form of production, which in their turn effect corresponding variations in the other phases of social life. "But the historical development of the antagonisms immanent in a given form of production is the only way in which that form of production can be dissolved and a new form established."² Each productive system has for its mission the unfolding of all the forces of production of which it is capable, and which gradually clear the way for the new system. Then it

¹ *Critique of Political Economy*, p. 12. "Whenever a certain maturity is reached, one definite social form is discarded and displaced by a higher one. The time for the coming of such a crisis is announced by the depth and breadth of the contradictions and antagonisms, which separate the conditions of distribution, and with them the definite historical form of the corresponding conditions of production, from the productive forces, the productivity, and development of their agencies." *Capital*, vol. iii, 1030. Cf. *Communist Manifesto*, pp. 19-20; Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, pp. 47, 80.

² *Capital*, vol. i, 534-535.

goes under, ceding its place to a new régime woven out of the raw material already prepared. "No social order ever disappears before all the productive forces, for which there is room in it, have been developed; and new higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society."¹

When the new synthesis has established itself, the cycle begins over again. The dialectic knows no rest. "There is a continual movement of growth in the productive forces, of destruction in the social relations, of formation in ideas; there is nothing immutable but the abstraction of the movement — *mors immortalis*."² However, all this applies only to the eras before the advent of socialism. As soon as this cherished system arrives, antitheses have nothing to feed on, the antagonisms allay; and the dialectic ceases in its travails.

But while this evolution goes on, there is no arbitrariness in it. The path of objective necessity governs it. One order grows out of the previous order, and is regulated by the nature and possibilities of its predecessor. Thus the prerequisite of capitalist production "is itself the historical result and product of a preceding process, from which the new mode of production takes its departure as from its given foundation."³ Commerce has the power of dissolving the régimes of production amid which it operates. But "to what this process of dissolution will lead, in other words, what new mode of production will take the place of the old, does not depend on commerce but on the character of the old mode of production itself. In the world of antiquity the effect of commerce and the development of merchants' capital always results in slave economy. . . . However, in the modern world, it results in the capitalist mode of production."⁴ The dialectic knows no caprice. It is an inexorable law of motion, demolishing old systems and ushering in new ones. It guides history toward the irresistible goal.

¹ Marx, *Critique of Political Economy*, p. 12.

² Idem, *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 119.

³ *Capital*, vol. iii, 1023.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 390-391.

CHAPTER IV

THE BASES OF HISTORY UP TO THE PRESENT

UP to the present the dialectic has evolved for mankind four distinct productive régimes, and accordingly Marx divides all past history into four epochs. "In broad outlines we can designate the Asiatic, the ancient, the feudal, and the modern bourgeois modes of production as so many epochs in the modern formation of society." All these are "prehistoric" eras, mere preludes to the glorious fifth and last epoch, the socialistic.¹

The first economic order, the Asiatic, prevails in the infancy of human development, and the best examples of it available at the time Marx was writing *Das Kapital* are the Slavs, especially the Russians, and the "Asiatic communities," notably in India.² This mode of production is characterized by communal property and "directly associated labor." Agriculture and crafts are the chief occupations. The land is held in common, tilled in common by the members of the tribe, and the yield is divided among the producers, for consumption.³ The other needs are supplied by each family through handicraft labor. The patriarchal industries of the peasant household or certain Indian communities furnish the illustration: spinning, weaving, cattle raising, the preparation of clothing, are functions performed by the whole family; division of labor within this unit is based on differences of age and sex, and on natural conditions varying with the seasons. Side by side with the masses thus occupied, there is a handful of people charged with duties of public interest, and maintained at the expense of the community; as the smith, the carpenter, watchmen, judges, and the like. Goods are produced mainly for consumption; trading is carried on to a limited extent, and chiefly between neighboring tribes, who make different articles according to the natural resources. This is the origin of exchange.⁴

¹ *Critique of Political Economy*, p. 13. See above, p. 10.

² *Capital*, vol. i, 89 and n.

³ Cf. Engels, *Anti-Dühring*

⁴ *Capital*, vol. i, 90 ff, 100, 392 ff, 386.

Marx's general comment on this epoch is as follows:

Those ancient social organisms of production are, as compared with bourgeois society, extremely simple and transparent. But they are founded either on the immature development of man individually, who has not yet severed the umbilical cord that unites him with his fellow men in a primitive tribal community, or upon direct relations of subjection. They can arise and exist only when the development of the productive power of labor has not risen beyond a low stage, and when, therefore, the social relations within the sphere of material life, between man and man, and between man and Nature, are correspondingly narrow.¹

Marx states that this economic stage dominates "at the dawn of history of all civilized races."² A more or less detailed discussion of this period among the peoples of classical antiquity is furnished by Engels in his *Origin of the Family*. He does not refer to it, however, as the Asiatic stage, but prefers to term it the "gens" organization of society, following the terminology of Lewis Morgan in *Ancient Society*.

The gens is Engels's favorite, and he cannot lavish enough praise and admiration on it.³ In its truest form he finds it only among the Iroquois Indians of North America, at the lower stage of barbarism; and he discusses at length their social organization, emphasizing coöperative production, common ownership of land, and the total absence of private property. At the dawn of Athens' history, we see her at the upper level of barbarism, or two stages beyond the Iroquois. It is the heroic era described in the epics of Homer. "Gentilism" is fully alive, although not in its pure archaic form. However, soon an ominous phenomenon appears that ultimately deals a death blow to the communal order. It is private property. Maternal law is gradually superseded by paternal rule, leading to the inheritance of wealth by the children, to the rise of the family as the unit, and to the accumulation of riches. "Rising private property had thus made its first opening in the gentile constitution," and "the fundament of the gentile law was shattered" (pages 120, 129).

Engels fully realizes that it was private property that swept away this economic stage, and that unloosed all the evils upon

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 91.

² *Critique of Political Economy*, p. 29.

³ See *Origin of the Family*, p. 117.

mankind. "The advent of private property in herds of cattle and articles of luxury led to an exchange between individuals, to a transformation of products into commodities. Here is the root of the entire revolution that followed" (page 135). But to the crucial question why private property sprang into existence at all, why the "splendid men and women" developed by the gens did not guard jealously and valiantly their communal constitution, "so wonderful . . . in all its natural simplicity" (page 117), and allowed the baleful institution of the "formerly so despised private property" (page 130) to fasten itself upon them — to this Engels gives no answer. Already in the middle stage of barbarism, he indicates, private property in cattle makes its appearance in Asia, but "How and when the herds were transferred from the collective ownership of the tribe or gens to the proprietorship of the heads of the families, is not known to us" (page 195). He is content with the naïve remark that "the herds drifted into the hands of private individuals" (page 194).¹

In the general summary at the end of the book Engels records that at the upper stage of barbarism iron becomes the servant of man. "It is the last and most important of all raw products that play a revolutionary rôle in history; the last — if we except the potato" (page 197). Iron furnishes adequate tools in agriculture and crafts; but it does this gradually, because "The first iron was often softer than bronze," and therefore it had not displaced stone axes even as late as the battle at Hastings in 1066 (page 197). When discussing the developments in Athens, he completely fails to mention the discovery of iron. The influence he ascribes to the new technical methods made possible by this metal is, therefore, somewhat obscure.

At any rate, during the last period of upper barbarism, progress is "irresistible, less interrupted and more rapid." Agriculture develops and yields new products, like oil and wine. Handicraft industry becomes increasingly diversified, especially in

¹ In another work he makes a general statement, no more illuminating, to the effect that "where private property arises, it appears as a result of a change in the methods of production and exchange in the interests of the increase of production and the development of commerce." *Anti-Dühring*, p. 188.

textiles and metals. The town and the artisan are more and more divided off from the country and the agricultural laborer. Wealth is eagerly sought after. Production for exchange increases, and commerce advances. The sea trade "drifts" rapidly out of the power of the Phoenicians and into the hands of the Athenians. Tribes surrender their peaceful pursuits, and devote themselves to plunder on land and to piracy on sea. Production improves to such a degree that a worker can produce more than he requires to maintain himself. As a consequence, labor power is rendered desirable; and since the communal system affords no source of surplus laborers except the prisoners of war, the captives are killed no longer but are retained as slaves. Before, slavery was only a sporadic phenomenon; now it becomes an institution. The gens régime is dying, and the second economic stage, the era of classical antiquity, arrives.¹

From this account we see that Engels finds several causes of the disintegration of primitive communism. One consists in the change of the family organization; for group marriage begins to lose ground, and paternal lineage supplants maternal law. This is in agreement with Engels's thesis that in primitive times the structure of the family, and not the mode of production, is of supreme importance in promoting a transition from one stage of development to another. A second cause is the appearance of private property, which leads to the inheritance of wealth, to exchange, and therefore to the transformation of products into commodities, that is, merchandise; and which breaks up the community of interests and introduces instead the antagonism between rich and poor.² A third is the discovery of iron. How much significance Engels attaches to this factor is hard to say, for he omits this fact entirely in his main treatment of the extinction of the gens. At best, then, we may surmise that the transition from tribal communism to the next order is partly due to new technical developments in the methods of production.

¹ Engels, *Origin of the Family*, pp. 130 ff., 197 ff.; also *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 186, 208-210. Note that on p. 209 he contends that slavery is "the dominant form of production among all people who had developed beyond the tribal communal stage."

² *Origin of the Family*, p. 200. Cf. *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 188-189.

We are now at the point where upper barbarism is gone, and civilization is dawning. We come to an era of slaves, "whose forced labor formed the basis on which the whole superstructure of society was reared" (page 203). They are recruited not only from prisoners of war, but also from "tribal and gentile associates" (page 129). In the period of her bloom there are in Athens 90,000 free citizens and 365,000 slaves (page 143); Corinth and Aegina possess about half a million slaves, ten times the number of free citizens (page 203, footnote). Slaves swarm in the shops and factories.¹ Labor by a free citizen is despised; nevertheless there are many free artisans who earn a living, in competition with slave labor (page 143). Engels esteems this régime as of transcendent historical value. It was a distinct step ahead. It gave to the world Greece, the glory of ancient civilization, the watershed from which flowed the streams of modern thought and institutions. "Without slavery there would have been no Grecian state, no Grecian art and science, and no Roman Empire . . . no modern Europe . . . no modern socialism."²

The surplus produced by the masses of slaves stimulates trade, commerce, and navigation still further. A new figure appears in a new division of labor — the merchant. The division between town and country is one among producers; but this "class of parasites, genuine social ichneumons,"³ does not engage in production, it merely connects producers, and extends markets. The merchant becomes, however, the central figure in society. He exploits the direct producers, amasses wealth, gains prestige, and struggles with the old nobility for supremacy. He wields in his hands a new powerful weapon, "before which the whole of society must bow down," money, that comes into use to facilitate exchange (page 136). Engels has a superstitious fear of money, for it possesses the uncanny power of dissolving social orders with its "corrugating acid" (page 133). Wherever this virulent agent appears, social systems crumble down.⁴

¹ "The great number of slaves is explained by the fact that many of them worked together in large factories under supervision" (p. 143). See also *Anti-Dühring*, p. 187.

² *Anti-Dühring*, p. 209.

³ *Origin of the Family*, p. 201.

⁴ *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 249-250, 256, 178.

In the hands of the merchant and the nobility money begins to work havoc in Greece also. The old communal ties that protected the farmer against the loss of land have been loosened with the appearance of private property. He contracts now monetary debts, mortgages his land, finds himself unable to pay the usurious rates, and forfeits the land; and to cover the remainder of the debt, the "bloodsuckers" sell him or his children into slavery. "Such was the pleasant dawn of civilization among the people of Attica."¹ "You have clamored for free, full, saleable land. Well, then, there you have it — *tu l'as voulu, Georges Dandin*; it was your own wish, George Dandin" (page 203). This strife between the rich and the poor results in a series of constitutions by Theseus, Solon, and Kleisthenes, which mitigate the evils, but only temporarily. Soon exploitation shifts from one between rich and poor to one between master and slave, and continues through the rest of the history of Athens. The Athenian state is ever an instrument of the rich, wielded to war against the poor and to hold the slaves in check (pages 142, 207).

No such troubles, Engels reflects, could have come upon a gens order, where the unchanging mode of production is primitive, but where man has control over his product. Private property leads to exchange, and exchange implies that the producer no longer controls his product. The product turns against the producer and oppresses him. "No society can, therefore, retain for any length of time the control of its own production and of the social effects of the mode of production, unless it abolishes exchange between individuals" (pages 135-136).

Greece meets her fate. "Not democracy caused the downfall of Athens . . . but slavery ostracizing the labor of the free citizen" (page 143). For the transition to the third epoch, or feudalism, we have to turn to Rome.

Like Greece, Rome steps into history with the gens institution, and, as in Greece, tribal communism cedes its place to slavery. At its zenith we find the empire extended all around the Mediterranean, consisting of a multitude of nations and elements held united by one external bond, the iron power of the State (page

¹ *Origin of the Family*, p. 134.

178). Rome as well as the provinces are oppressed and impoverished by grinding taxes, by imposts and tithes, by constant bleeding through wars, and by "blackmailing practices" of the officials (page 179). Commerce and industry are never a strong point with the Romans (page 179); yet about these pursuits is woven a magnificent code of law which, according to Engels himself, could suit the capitalist conditions in various countries many centuries later.¹ Usury reaches the highest scale of development ever attained in antiquity. Instead of helping the war-ruined plebeians directly with the prerequisites of production like grain, horses, and cattle, the patricians lend them the copper looted in the wars that the same plebeians were forced to fight, exact from them exorbitant interest payments, and turn the defaulting victims into their debtor slaves. "The mere death of a cow may render the small producer unable to renew his reproduction on the former scale. Then he falls into the clutches of the usurer, and once he is in the usurer's power, he never extricates himself."²

The poverty of the masses contributes to the causes of the decline in traffic and the decay of the towns. The shrinking markets commence to impose restrictions on production. The immense estates, the *latifundiae*, where slaves pursue large scale agriculture, are no longer remunerative. They are accordingly parceled out to hereditary tenants for a fixed rent, but mainly to colonists, who pay a fixed sum annually, and who can be "transferred by sale together with their lots." Colonists are not freeman, they are "the prototypes of the medieval serfs."³ Neither does manufacture, based on slave labor, yield profitable returns. For these reasons the institution of slavery is finally abolished. Small scale production is instituted in all pursuits. However, free artisans are not prevalent, for labor is despised as slavish. Rome is in a "closed alley." "There was no other help but a complete revolution."⁴

The provinces fare no better. To escape the oppression of the officials, the judges, and the usurers, the independent farmers

¹ *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. xxvii; *Feuerbach*, p. 115.

² *Origin of the Family*, pp. 179-180; *Capital*, vol. iii, 697, 703-704.

³ *Origin of the Family*, pp. 180-181.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 181-182.

place themselves under the protection of a man of power. The patron takes advantage of their plight, and imposes on them the harsh condition of a transfer to him of their title to the land. Servitude is the outcome of the oppressive policy of Rome.¹

The settlement of the barbarian invaders on Roman soil does not alter conditions. Ever since their contact with the Romans their communal order had begun to crumble. When they triumph completely over Rome, overrun its territories, and take the reins of government, they find that the gens constitution is too primitive and too inadequate an instrument to solve the new complex problems.² Roman methods are adopted; and in the ninth century we face the same social and economic conditions that we saw in Rome four hundred years before. Serfdom spreads on an ever-increasing scale.

However, the barbarians make some salutary contributions. They are but slightly contaminated with the institution of slavery; consequently free labor with them is no longer despised. Again, they bequeath to feudalism several traces of the gens elements of property ownership; a legacy that serves, at least in France, Germany, and England, as a tower of strength to the oppressed serfs, later in the Middle Ages.³

It is not exactly clear how the dialectic manages to achieve a transformation of the slave mode of production into a feudal mode. What are the productive forces liberated by slavery that must unavoidably yield a higher order? Wherein consists the contradiction between these productive forces and the old mode of production? Feudalism is ushered in by agencies not inevitably and inherently flowing from a slave régime. It is rather the decadence of the markets that renders slavery unprofitable. It is rather the insecurity of the independent farmer, caused by wars and an oppressive government, that compels him to seek protection. It is rather the force of external historical events that injects into decrepit Rome the fresh vigor of the Germans, who "introduce the mild form of servitude which they had been practising at home."⁴ The crucial question is: does a slave mode of

¹ *Origin of the Family*, p. 182. Cf. *Capital*, vol. iii, 703.

² *Origin of the Family*, pp. 184-185.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

production, by its very nature, unaided by external occurrences, release elements that have for their mission the establishing of feudalism? To this question we find no answer.

Under feudalism, "Peasant agriculture on a small scale, and the carrying on of independent handicrafts . . . together form the basis of the . . . mode of production."¹ In the country, the serf possesses the land by some hereditary right or other understanding, although absolute ownership is vested in the lord.² In addition to farming, the peasant and his family are engaged in domestic industry in order to provide for the other needs. In both pursuits the worker owns the means of production, produces chiefly for his consumption or for a very narrow market, and enjoys full control over the product.³ But he is a serf. He has to perform some forced labor for the state, as *corvée*, and he must pay a rent to the lord. The rent may be in the form of labor done on the lord's estate: this is a clear, unmistakable form of surplus-value.⁴ Later, the rent in kind appears, and the serf surrenders a definite amount in agricultural and handicraft products.⁵ When commerce develops to a large extent, and when money comes into prevalent use, he can pay his rent in the new medium.⁶ In all these cases the peasant is not hindered from producing a surplus above his needs, from selling it in the market, and from accumulating wealth.

In the town, the artisan follows handicraft industry. He owns the raw material and other means of production as well as the completed product, and he is perfectly familiar with the market for which he produces. Here, too, the direct producer dominates his product. Engels paints idyllic pictures of guild production and muses over them with historical homesickness: the master with his small garden, with his cattle pasturing on the common, and the apprentice working more for education than for his pay in board and lodging, remind him of the charm of days that were but are no more.⁷

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 367 n.

² *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 921.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 918; vol. i, 818-820. Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. 57.

⁴ *Capital*, vol. iii, 919.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 923-924.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 925.

⁷ Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, pp. 51-52.

Now, as in antiquity, the sinister figure of the usurer is ubiquitous. Whenever personal accident or a bad season involves the small producer in town or country in difficulties, he has recourse to this person, who is in wait for him.¹ Another familiar figure is the merchant, who facilitates exchange between town and country. He wages war against the usurer. Already in the twelfth and fourteenth centuries the Venice and Genoa merchants form credit associations to finance their extensive land and maritime trade, and to emancipate themselves from the clutches of the usurer.² The dominant forms of capital are the usurer's and the merchant's capital; and it cannot turn into industrial capital because of the feudal restrictions in the country and the guild regulations in the town.³ "While the country exploits the town politically in the Middle Ages, wherever feudalism has not been broken down by an exceptional development of the towns, the town, on the other hand, everywhere and without exception exploits the land economically by its monopoly prices, its system of taxation, its guild organizations, its direct mercantile fraud and its usury."⁴

Slowly and persistently new elements develop within the bosom of this society. Serfdom is swept away in England in the fourteenth century. The semi-independent peasant pays his rent in kind, and later in money. He is no longer hampered by the restrictions attached to labor-rent; he can even buy himself free from the landlord for a lump sum of money. Many a guildmaster or independent artisan begins to employ wage labor, and gradually becomes a small capitalist. The same is true, and to a higher degree, of the merchant, who assumes possession of production by hiring and exploiting labor, and who develops new markets. But all this merely constitutes faint beginnings of capitalism, sprouting out sporadically here and there in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁵

The new productive forces and the nascent bourgeoisie are handicapped at each step by the trammels of the old mode of production and social relations — by feudal restrictions, guild

¹ *Capital*, vol. iii, 699, 703.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 706-707.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. i, 822-823.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 930.

⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. i, 787-788, 815, 822; vol. iii, 393, 395, 928.

regulations, absence of freedom of contract, multitudinous local legal provisions, diverse schemes of taxation, and the arrogant privileges of the hierarchical nobility. There is an insistent call for hired labor, but labor "free" for hire is tantalizingly scarce because of the guild impediments and because of the independence of the peasant proprietor; everywhere the worker possesses the means of production and toils for himself. Likewise, "the money capital formed by means of usury and commerce was prevented from turning into industrial capital, in the country by the feudal constitution, in the town by the guild organization," complains Marx. At best, the bourgeois advances at "the snail's pace." The play of mightier forces is required to establish firmly the fourth, the capitalistic, era of production.¹

These forces do not fail to arrive. At the end of the fifteenth century the great geographical discoveries startle the world. Oversea trade is feverishly developed; tremendous far-away markets grow up. The demand for commodities is progressively augmented, but the old form of production and the sluggishly developing new one are utterly inadequate to meet the new commercial requirements. Fresh incentives as well as fresh means appear for the extirpation of the old order.

The discovery of America, the rounding of the Cape, opened up fresh ground for the rising bourgeoisie. The East-Indian and Chinese markets, the colonization of America, trade with the colonies, the increase in the means of exchange and in commodities generally, gave to commerce, to navigation, to industry, an impulse never before known, and thereby, to the revolutionary element in the tottering feudal society, a rapid development, —

chronicles the *Communist Manifesto* (page 13).²

However, while supplying perhaps the prime cause, the geographical discoveries do not represent the sole element in this upheaval. Other forces also figure in the far-reaching event. The process is, in brief, as follows.

Before capitalistic production can establish itself, certain conditions must be fulfilled. "In themselves, money, commodities

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 786, 809-810, 822-823, 835; Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 142, 192.

² *Capital*, vol. i, 469, 822; vol. iii, 391; Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 141, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, pp. 58-59.

are no more capital than are the means of production and of subsistence. They want transforming into capital. But this transformation can take place only under certain circumstances that center in this, namely, that two very different kinds of commodity possessors must come face to face and into contact." These two kinds are, on the one hand, the owners of money and means of production, eager to hire wage labor; and on the other hand, masses of workers, dispossessed, divorced from the means of production, owners of labor-power and eager to sell it for a wage. "With this polarization of the market for commodities, the fundamental conditions of capitalist production are given."¹ In other words, capitalism cannot arise without the antecedent expropriation of the many and the enrichment of the few.²

The realization of these two conditions is achieved by a process that Marx terms "original accumulation" (*ursprüngliche Akkumulation*) — original, because it forms the "pre-historic stage," the basis and starting-point of capitalism.³ Original accumulation begins in the last third of the fifteenth century. It is the expropriation of the independent farmer, an expropriation "written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire." The drama is enacted in England. There are various factors at work. The impoverished feudal nobility disband the numerous retainers who had thronged house and castle. At the same time, the enclosure movement is inaugurated by the lords who desire to turn arable land into sheep-walks; and whole populations of independent peasants are uprooted from the soil and cast adrift in utter ruin. The Reformation imparts a "new and frightful impulse" to the process, through the suppression of monasteries and the dispersion of serfs attached to them. The whole event is a succession of "the most shameless violation of the 'sacred rights of property' and the grossest acts of violence to persons"; "a whole series of thefts, outrages, and popular misery"; a display of "merciless

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 785, 189.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 624-625, 848, 684.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 784, 786. The English translation has "primitive accumulation." This is a misleading expression. "Original accumulation" is better. Marx himself employed this expression in an address delivered in English. See *Value, Price and Profits*, p. 74.

vandalism . . . of passions the most infamous, the most sordid, the pettiest, the most meanly odious.”¹

Armies of homeless, enraged vagabonds are thus let loose, who, partly by need and partly by inclination, take to robbery and thieving. Thereupon comes the bloody legislation against them, inflicting severe punishment for idleness, and disciplining them to sell their labor at any price. “Thus were the agricultural people first forcibly expropriated from the soil, driven from their homes, turned into vagabonds, and then whipped, branded, tortured by laws grotesquely terrible, into the discipline necessary for the wage system.”² A proletarian class is created, alienated from the means of production, unfettered by feudal restrictions and guild regulations, ready to be hired and exploited.³

Simultaneously with these events, there is at play another set of forces in this “original accumulation,” which aim to fulfill the other condition, namely, the amassing of wealth and the formation of a bourgeoisie intent on exploiting labor. Among these forces the geographical discoveries are once more of paramount significance. “One of the most indispensable conditions for the formation of the manufacturing industry was the accumulation of capital facilitated by the discovery of America and the introduction of its precious metals.” America floods Europe with gold and silver; a tremendous rise in prices ensues, with the consequent ruination of the landlord and the laboring class through the depreciation of rent and wages, and with the concurrent elevation of the bourgeoisie through a rise in profits.⁴ The “Christian colonial system” is marked by barbarities and desperate outrages, by the extirpation of the aborigines or their entombment in the mines. East India is conquered and looted; Africa is turned into “a warren for the commercial hunting of black skins”; and “The treasures captured outside Europe by undisguised looting, enslavement, and murder, floated back to the mother country and were there turned into capital.”⁵

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 786–805, 835; *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 149.

² *Capital*, vol. i, 808–809.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 817.

⁴ Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 148. Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 141.

⁵ *Capital*, vol. i, 823–826.

The state takes an active part in all these proceedings, and enthusiastically employs devious expedients that would hasten the course of original accumulation in both of its phases. The state power is employed in pressing the newly formed proletariat into the workshop by draconian laws against idleness, in forcing down his wage, in prolonging his workday, and in maintaining him in the proper degree of subjection.¹ It launches elaborate schemes of national debts, or public credit, which, "as with the stroke of an enchanter's wand," endow "barren money with the power of breeding" and of turning easily into capital. These public debts form a class of lazy annuitants; furnish improvised wealth to financiers and windfalls to tax farmers, merchants and manufacturers; and foster joint-stock companies, stock exchange gambling, and the modern "bankocracy." National loans have as their unavoidable complement a régime of increased taxation — a convenient mode of expropriating the masses. Then add the system of protection, which is an ideal "artificial means of manufacturing manufacturers, of expropriating independent laborers . . . of forcibly abbreviating the transition from the medieval to the modern mode of production."²

Tantae molis erat [summarizes Marx] to establish the "eternal laws of Nature" of the capitalist mode of production, to complete the process of separation between laborers and conditions of labor, to transform, at one pole, the social means of production and subsistence into capital, at the opposite pole, the mass of the population into wage laborers, into "free laboring poor," that artificial product of modern society. If money, according to Augier, "comes into the world with a congenital blood-stain on one cheek," capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt.³

The capitalist era is not heralded by any technological inventions. There is merely a change in the grouping of laborers and in the ownership of the raw material and of the other means of production. "The workshop of the medieval master handicraftsman is simply enlarged": the wealthy bourgeois employer gathers many laborers under his supervision, and they work for him. There is no deviation from the methods of production as pursued

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 809.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 826-830.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 833-834.

by the guilds, except in scale. This is, "both historically and logically, the starting-point of capitalist production."¹

Marx distinguishes two phases of productive organization in the capitalist era. There is a preliminary stage, which he terms coöperation, and defines as a gathering of numerous laborers working side by side on one and the same process, or on different but connected processes, under the surveillance of the capitalist.² Coöperation is a familiar phenomenon in the first economic epoch, with its gens society, but there we see no capitalist; all the workers own in common the means of production, and they produce directly for their own needs. There is also coöperation in the workshop of classical antiquity, but there the laborers are not "free," they are slaves. Likewise, we find coöperation in the house of the medieval guild master, but it is on a smaller scale; moreover, the apprentice is not so much a provider of surplus-value to an exploiter as a pupil preparing himself to become master in due time.³

As an independent phase, however, coöperation does not prevail over a long period of time. The first phase *par excellence* of capitalist production is the one that Marx names "manufacture" (hand-labor), which lasts over two hundred years, from the middle of the sixteenth century to the last third of the eighteenth.⁴ It begins as a two-fold development. As in the case of simple coöperation, the employer assembles in the workshop a number of artificers, all of whom do the same work, and each one of whom goes through alone all the successive processes necessary for the completion of the product. Or, the capitalist employs simultaneously various craftsmen, who are engaged in the successive handicraft pursuits which contribute to a final product; thus he engages wheelwrights, harness-makers, blacksmiths, painters, and so forth, to coöperate in making carriages. In either case, sooner or later, an elaborate form of division of labor sets in, and what was previously performed by one handicraftsman is resolved into

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 353, 362, 367. Cf. Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. 83.

² *Capital*, vol. i, 357, 361.

³ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 367.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 368-369.

many elementary processes one or more of which claims the full attention of the worker.¹ As time goes on, experience shows that the old tools are not well adapted to the minute tasks; therefore they are improved and turned into more specialized ones, to suit the detailed operations.² In some cases the laborers are not assembled under one roof, but work independently in their homes. However, they are no more the free guildsmen of yore; they toil under the control, and at the beck, of the capitalist employer.³

Manufacture does not represent a radical departure from the medieval handicraft system. It depends, in the first place, on the rural community, for it does not effect a complete separation between town and country. The raw material — as wool, flax, silk — used in production is prepared by a newly developing class of small villagers who follow agriculture as a mere accessory, and who devote themselves chiefly to domestic industry, selling their industrial product to the manufacturer, directly or through a merchant.⁴ In the second place, even the detailed laborer is essentially the old craftsman. Each operation, whether complex or simple, is a handicraft operation depending on personal “strength, skill, quickness, and sureness”; and on “muscular development, keenness of sight, cunning of hand,” in manipulating the “dwarfish implements.” Handicraft skill is the foundation of manufacture, and “the mechanism of manufacture as a whole possesses no framework, apart from the laborers themselves.” Machinery plays an insignificant part and is used only sporadically. “The collective laborer, formed by the combination of a number of detail laborers, is the machinery specially characteristic of the manufacturing period.”⁵

This whole mode of production “towered up as an economical work of art, on the broad foundation of the town handicrafts, and of the rural domestic industries.”⁶ It is incapable of satisfying

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 369-370.

² *Ibid.*, p. 374.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 376-377.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 818-820; *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 152.

⁵ *Capital*, vol. i, 417-418, 371, 403, 383. “During the manufacturing period, handicraft labor, altered though it was by division of labor, was yet the basis.” *Ibid.*, pp. 469, 372.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 404.

the demands of an ever-developing, ever-expanding market. "When in England the market had become so fully developed that manual labor no longer sufficed to supply it, the need for machinery made itself felt. It was then that the application of mechanical science, which had been fully prepared during the eighteenth century, was thought of."¹

The capitalist system of production has existed for two hundred years without having machinery or any other new technical development as its distinctive mark.² Technique does not introduce capitalism, nor does it characterize it during its first long phase, "manufacture." Only with the arrival of the second phase, at the end of the eighteenth century, machinery begins to serve as the dominant characteristic. This phase Marx and Engels call "modern industry," and it is introduced by mechanical inventions.³ The overmastering feature of modern industry is the factory.

The rest is familiar. It is the story of the fervid and prolific Marxian indictments against the present system with its monstrosities and inefficiency; of the enslavement of man to the machine, of the remorseless grinding of surplus-value out of the exploited wage-slaves; of the industrial reserve army, of the increasing misery of the workers, and of crises and panics. All this will receive more attention in a later chapter.

With the passing of primitive communism came the Fall of Man. The adoption of private property is his original sin. The lost paradise will be regained only when socialism begins to dawn on the troubled capitalistic world. The various past systems of

¹ Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 152.

² "That coöperation which is based on division of labor, assumes its typical form in the manufacture, and is the prevalent characteristic form of the capitalist process of production throughout the manufacturing period properly so called. That period, roughly speaking, extends from the middle of the sixteenth to the last third of the eighteenth century." *Capital*, vol. i, 368-369.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 430. "Machinery does away with coöperation based on handicrafts, and with manufacture based on the division of handicraft labor." *Ibid.*, p. 502. "Machinery properly so called dates from the end of the eighteenth century." *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 150. In *Anti-Dühring*, p. 191, Engels records that the weapon of the bourgeoisie in its struggle with the feudal nobility consisted in the power gained from the growth "at first of hand-manufacture and afterwards machine-manufacture."

production have carried mankind through all its vicissitudes, and finally threw it into the turmoil of capitalism. But the fifth régime of production will redeem it. Such is the mission of socialism. The world has suffered because of its previous productive orders, and it will be saved by virtue of the coming mode of production — for the mode of production is the basis of all history.

PART II

THE HUMAN ELEMENT IN HISTORY

CHAPTER V

MARX'S VIEW OF HUMAN NATURE

THE mode of production forms the foundation upon which the various phases of human life are carried on, and constitutes the supreme cause of social processes. But this objective agency cannot, of itself, enact history; it can do no more than prepare the stage and provide the text of the play. Actors have to appear and perform accordingly. This part is fulfilled by human beings. Man makes his history. Marx and Engels reiterate this; nevertheless, we find them also steadily emphasizing that the brunt of the battle for progress is borne, not by individuals, but by classes. Not man but the class is the ultimate animate factor that makes history in conformity with the dictates of the material elements. The *Communist Manifesto* opens with the declaration: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles." The allotting of this momentous task to the class instead of the individual is a direct result of their theory of human nature, of their insistence on imputing scant significance to the individual in the drama of social life, as compared with the power accorded to the class and to class interests. In their scheme man has little capacity to act as an individual; in history he is of subordinate importance when considered alone. The class is the actor.

Among discussions of human nature we find three views: the hereditary, the environmental, and the eclectic. The hereditary theory insists that human nature is fundamentally an inherited aggregate of instincts, propensities, abilities, and emotions. Man appears at birth equipped with an apparatus of characteristics in various combinations, degrees of intensity, and shades of color. This mechanism can be modified only slightly, if at all, by the circumstances that envelop the human being during his life. His endowments, his distinctive make-up, are biological in nature, and therefore immutable. This basic equipment will determine his conduct and reactions in the daily routine of his life as well as on marked occasions. Man is what he is by heredity.

The environmentalists argue that a mere catalogue of propensities and capabilities is a vacuum, a bare abstraction signifying nothing. Human nature is a summation of the phases of actual behavior, of manners of responding to stimuli, and of ways of looking at things. A human being is not a bundle of instincts; he is a synthesis of daily acts, of interests that claim his attention, and of notions that fill his head. The synthesis, which gives a photographic presentation of his conduct, depends primarily on the environment which furnishes the peculiar excitations. It is true that man has inherent dispositions, but the way he actually behaves depends on the nature of the stimuli impinging on his consciousness, on the *milieu* in which he lives. The tendencies which color the reaction are inborn and therefore stationary, but the reactions themselves are capable of variations according to the stimuli. It is the environment that crushes or develops abilities and propensities, that supplies the manifold situations to which the individual is to respond, and that breeds the ideas he imbibes. The hereditary powers are the constant; the environmental pressures constitute the variable, depending on time and place. It is the environment that determines and shapes human nature, and different environments will produce different reactions and ideas—different human beings. The ancient Greek, the slave-master, sitting under his fig tree and talking politics or discussing the latest production of Phidias, is a different sort of human being from the modern worker rushing to the factory on elevated trains, reading the concocted editorials, and frequenting the motion pictures. The hereditary endowments of these two types doubtlessly do not diverge much; but the environmental forces are radically different, and they conspired to produce two altogether disparate human natures.

The third theory amalgamates these two views. It urges that heredity furnishes the powers and potentialities, whereas environment provides the channel into which these flow, the direction they take, the intensity they gain, and the coloration they assume.

Of these the environmental view is emphasized by Marx and Engels with particular force. It does not mean, however, that they are unaware of the hereditary faculties residing in man.

They realize that man has inborn abilities and inclinations. But these are potential and need activity and leisure for their wholesome development. Each person possesses a "natural fertility of mind," which lies fallow, and is stunted or stimulated to growth, according as the environment is favorable or not. Thus, Marx indicates, social division of labor, as well as the minuter division in the manufacturing processes, is based on "their [the workers'] natural and their acquired capabilities," on "natural endowments"; and it offers individuals the opportunity of finding a field of employment suitable to their "various bents and talents."¹ At the same time, he and Engels complain that division of labor, by calling to constant exercise a single muscular or mental performance, slaughters all "intellectual and bodily capacities," and converts the laborer into a crippled monstrosity, because a "world of productive capabilities and instincts" are sacrificed to the acquisition of dexterity in a minute detail.²

They are also aware that these faculties are not possessed by all individuals in uniform quantity and quality. People differ in their natural gifts physically and mentally. Men are not born equal.³ Two persons working side by side will not devote the same amount of time to the production of a commodity, partly because of differences in "purely negative moral qualities, such as patience, impassibility, assiduity."⁴ Division of labor rests on the inequalities among workers: one operation needs more strength, another more skill, another more attention; "and the same individual does not possess all these qualities in an equal degree."⁵ Some persons lack the capacity for adaptation in a society based on division of labor, and therefore they stay idle and poor.⁶ "A man without wealth, but with energy, solidity, ability and business sense may become a capitalist. . . . In a similar way . . . the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages formed its hierarchy out of the best brains of people without regard to estate, birth, or wealth."⁷ Some men are born leaders, and Owen, a

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 198, 383-384, 401, 436.

² Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 238; *Capital*, vol. i, 396.

³ Marx, on the Gotha program, *International Socialist Review*, vol. viii, 649.

⁴ Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 58.

⁵ *Capital*, vol. i, 383.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 706.

⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 705-706.

product of heredity and environment, is one of the few.¹ Aristotle is "a giant thinker," "the greatest thinker of antiquity."² Xenophon in his writings shows already a "characteristic bourgeois instinct."³ Watt was a genius.⁴ John Bellers was "a very phenomenon in the history of political economy."⁵ Mandeville was "an honest, clear-headed man."⁶ The Venetian monk Ortes was an "original and clever writer."⁷ Engels assures us that he himself was at best but talented, whereas Marx was a genius.⁸ Wilhelm Liebknecht tells us in his memoirs that Marx was a believer in phrenology, and he would minutely examine the heads of any of his admirers before he would take them into his confidence.⁹ This obviously points to a belief in inborn differences, for Marx hardly expected that an acquired character would be heralded by the accession of a new bump.

That Marx believes in inborn race characteristics and differences was seen in citations in a previous chapter. On this subject he has decided views, especially as regards the German race. In his *Revolution and Counter Revolution* he expresses disapproval of the attempts of Bohemia and Croatia to join in a Pan-Slavic movement and to emancipate themselves from German domination. He pronounces such efforts as useless and explains why. The action of historical elements leads to an absorption of the feebler peoples by the "more energetic stock." The historical forces have through long centuries operated on these nationalities, and have undermined them.¹⁰ The "more energetic stock" refers here to the Germans, who have the "physical and intellectual power to subdue, absorb, and assimilate its ancient eastern neighbors." Marx is proud of this historical operation, for "this tendency of absorption on the part of the Germans had always been,

¹ Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. 20.

² *Capital*, vol. i, 94 n., 445-446.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 402.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 412.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 535 n.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 674.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 676 n.

⁸ *Feuerbach*, p. 93 n. In a letter to J. P. Becker, Engels writes: "I have been doing all my life what I was fit to do, namely, to play second fiddle." Marx was first fiddle. *Der Kampf*, vol. vi, 533.

⁹ *Karl Marx, Biographical Memoirs*, p. 52.

¹⁰ *Revolution and Counter Revolution*, p. 91.

and still was, one of the mightiest means by which the civilization of Western Europe had been spread in the east of that continent." Therefore, "the natural and inevitable fate of these dying nations was to allow this process of dissolution and absorption by their stronger neighbors to complete itself," instead of fighting the "historical tendency" and dreaming "that history would retrograde a thousand years in order to please a few phthisical bodies of men."¹ Engels, too, has a good opinion of the absorbers, and declares that "Of course, the Germans were a highly gifted Aryan branch."²

However, we must not lose sight of the fact that Marx and Engels do not intend to accord overmastering power to the effect of heredity on dissimilarities among men and races. Differences there are, but heredity is not the most significant and the most prevalent cause. Marx holds views similar to those of Adam Smith.

Adam Smith [he says] . . . has clearly seen that "in reality the difference of natural talents between individuals is much less than is supposed. These dispositions so different, which seem to distinguish the men of different professions when they arrive at mature age, are not so much the cause as the effect of the division of labor." In principle a porter differs less from a philosopher than a mastiff from a greyhound. It is the division of labor which has placed an abyss between the two.³

One outstanding characteristic, of great weight in history, and apparently held by Marx and Engels as innate, is man's stubborn adherence to tradition. Men, by and large, are very conservative. They are reluctant to make changes, except under pressure; they are not eager to study and examine things deeply. Their minds are not searching, doubting, and questioning, but are generally at rest. What is, especially what has existed for a long time, has in their estimation peculiar sanction and strength, and is not to be molested. Where people are even fighting in behalf of significant changes, the participants conjure up the battle cries and mottoes

¹ *Revolution and Counter Revolution*, pp. 137-138.

² *Origin of the Family*, p. 188. Cf. *Capital*, vol. iii, 919, 922, for further hints concerning race differences.

³ *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 140. The quotation from Adam Smith is somewhat inaccurate. See *The Wealth of Nations* (Everyman ed.), p. 14.

of the past, and clothe present events and characters with the associations of old deeds in order to lend dignity and glory to the issue at hand. They try to derive vigor and ardor, not so much from the contents of the problems that led to the crisis, as from old names and watchwords, and by calling into service the spirits of by-gone days.¹ The old has a strong grip on people, and progress proceeds slowly. "Tradition is a great retarding force, is the *vis inertiae* of history."² "The tradition of all past generations weighs like an Alp upon the brain of the living."³ Because of tradition and custom every new form of production retains for a long time certain vestiges of the old one. Elements of an antiquated system will cling to the framework of the new order until the latter is so fully developed that its pulsating vitality destroys the adhesive power of the old remnants, and dissolves them. Similarly with a standard of living, with workers' wages, and with the determination of interest; custom and age retain prerogative.⁴

A still more potent human trait is self-interest and its concomitants, greed and search for power and personal aggrandizement. Marx refers to it as "the most violent, mean and malignant passions of the human breast, the Furies of private interest."⁵ In its realization it displays man's most ignoble passions. To indicate the lengths to which capital will go when it scents its profits, he quotes approvingly from P. J. Dunning:

Capital eschews no profit, or very small profit, just as Nature was formerly said to abhor a vacuum. With adequate profit capital is very bold. A certain 10 per cent. will ensure its employment anywhere; 20 per cent. certain will produce eagerness; 50 per cent., positive audacity; 100 per cent. will make it ready to trample on all human laws; 300 per cent., and there is not a crime at which it will scruple, nor a risk it will not run, even to the chance of its owner being hanged. If turbulence and strife will bring a profit, it will freely encourage both. Smuggling and the slave trade have amply proved all that is here stated.⁶

¹ Marx, *18th Brumaire*, pp. 9-10.

² Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. xxxvii.

³ Marx, *18th Brumaire*, p. 9. *Alp* in German means also a nightmare.

⁴ *Capital*, vol. i, 190; vol. iii, 427.

⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. i, Introduction, p. 15.

⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. i, 834 n.

Self-interest is the cause of much suffering; but, as will be seen repeatedly in subsequent discussions, it is also a lever of social progress and change.

Only one period in the history of mankind was immune from the odious play of this monster. In the gens communities self-interest was unknown; it did not visit primitive society to mar its idyllic happiness. But with the fall of this order the earth became the scene of incessant turmoil. "Bare-faced covetousness was the moving spirit of civilization from its first dawn to the present day; wealth, and again wealth, and for the third time wealth; wealth, not of society, but of the puny individual, was its only and final aim."¹ When the curtain of history rises upon ancient Greece, we behold the mad rush for wealth; piracy on sea and plunder on land, the goal being "cattle, slaves, and treasure"; the farmer struggling in the clutches of the usurer; debtors and their children sold into servitude; the master and the slave.² The scene in Rome is not brighter. The blackmailing regents, the tax collectors, and the soldiers sapping and grinding the life out of the populace; the usurer-patricians living off the plebians; the noble degrading the independent peasant into a serf in exchange for protection — these are some of the hideous details.³ Even in the Middle Ages the mien of the feudal lord mars the picture; usurer's and merchant's capital are the dominant forms, and, with Marx, the latter always "stands for a system of robbery, and its development . . . is always connected with plundering, piracy, snatching of slaves, conquest of colonies."⁴

The advent of capitalism merely intensifies the play of self-interest. Original accumulation, which, to recall, prepared the ground for the thorough inauguration of this régime, is "written in letters of blood and fire," is marked by series of "thefts, outrages, popular misery," is an array of "murder, robbery and war." Born in the storm of blood and fire, the capitalist system, throughout its existence, exhibits no other policy. It maintains

¹ Engels, *Origin of the Family*, p. 215.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 129, 134, 143.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 179, 182; *Capital*, vol. iii, 699, 703.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 389-390.

no other relations between man and man than those based on the "nexus" of self-interest, complains the *Communist Manifesto* (page 15). In the hunger for wealth, all that is sacred is trampled upon, and nothing escapes violent hands. "Not even are the bones of saints, and still less are more delicate *res sacrosanctae extra commercium hominum* able to withstand this alchemy" of turning everything into gold.¹ The entire world becomes a market, with price as the universal language; and nationality is but the "guinea's stamp."² Only, at last, with the coming of socialism the ravages of self-interest will vanish. This order will furnish an environment utterly devoid of stimuli that would call the black trait into action.

It is true that the two writers are aware that human beings possess finer traits also. Engels confesses that "the mutual and reciprocal feelings of men for one another such as sexual love, friendship, compassion, self-sacrifice, etc.," are facts anyone can observe. He admits that at times men are impelled by "ideal motives, zeal for honor, enthusiasm for truth and justice, personal hate."³ Yet these finer qualities are regarded as private, domestic virtues manifested in the humbler dealings of everyday life. They do not figure in the historic processes and in social evolution. There they are marginal, not focal. On the arena of history, the all-pervasive and persistent human passion that plays a dominant part is self-interest.

This emphasis on self-interest is not a counterpart of the "economic man" of the English classical school of political economy. There is a difference. According to the exponents of the classical school, man was guided by considerations of self-interest only in a limited domain out of the whole realm of human activities, namely, in economic transactions. They did not insist that people are actuated by such motives in all the manifold spheres of life. Men like Adam Smith, Ricardo, and J. S. Mill hardly presumed to maintain that in politics and law, ethics and religion, art and science, the single human trait that inevitably obtrudes itself, and

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 148.

² Marx, *Critique of Political Economy*, pp. 207-208.

³ Feuerbach, pp. 77-78, 105.

preëminently does the shaping and the coloring, is self-interest. In his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* Adam Smith subjects to severe criticism all the views which make one or another aspect of self-interest the determining factor of social life and historical progress. He urges that the dominant force in society is, on the contrary, sympathy, or "fellow-feeling."¹

Similarly, J. S. Mill objects strenuously to the philosophers who maintain that "private, or worldly, interest" is the sole ruling principle of government. He insists that no one single human trait can be appealed to in order to explain a social phenomenon, but that "all the determining agencies" are to be studied carefully. "The phenomena of society do not depend, in essentials, on some one agency or law of human nature. . . . The whole of the qualities of human nature influence those phenomena, and there is not one which influences them in a small degree."² Marx and Engels are very remote from such views. If the older English economists assumed the economic man in pecuniary dealings, if Machiavelli constructed the "political man" in the domain of politics, Marx and his friend went much further. With them, man is impelled by the urgings of self-interest in every conceivable phase of social life and culture. With them, man had been and still is, especially if he is not a proletarian, the ideal incarnation, the apotheosis, of self-interest.

It is not exactly clear whether self-interest is considered by Marx and Engels an inborn trait of human nature or merely a product of environment. Such evidence as can be adduced on this question points, apparently, to their belief that it is innate. Engels lauds the achievements of civilization, but he decries the fact that the *instinct* of self-interest was the moving force behind them: "But these exploits were accomplished," he complains, "by playing on the most sordid passions and instincts of man, and

¹ Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, part vii, sections ii, iii, and iv, pp. 542-611.

² J. S. Mill, *System of Logic*, vol. ii, 467, 469, 472; cf. p. 511. Cf. Ricardo, *Principles of Political Economy* (Everyman ed.), p. 83. See the exceedingly suggestive article by Professor A. A. Young on "The Trend of Economics," in *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, vol. xxxix, especially pp. 175 ff.

by developing them at the expense of all his other gifts.”¹ In the primitive, communal gens war “reigned from tribe to tribe,” except where there were peace treaties; subsequently the cruelty of warfare was modified “simply by self-interest.”² Already in this excellent society the leaders coveted the usurper’s place, and the nobles sought wealth and power. In the dissolution of this order and in the introduction of classes self-interest played a commanding part. “The new system of classes is inaugurated by the meanest impulses: vulgar covetousness, brutal lust, sordid avarice, selfish robbery of commonwealth. The old gentile society without classes is undermined and brought to a fall by the most contemptible means: theft, violence, cunning, treason.”³ Introduce gold into a communal society, and one after another the social ties will break up, gradually bringing in a régime of private production.⁴ The question arises, How did such mean traits ever find their habitat in the human breast? The gens environment contained nothing that would produce them, since it was fit to raise only “splendid men and women.” It was a worthy society. “How wonderful,” exclaims Engels, “this gentile constitution is in all its natural simplicity! No soldiers, gendarmes, and policemen, no . . . prefects or judges, no prisons, no lawsuits, and still affairs run smoothly . . . There cannot be any poor and destitute. . . All are free and equal — the women included.”⁵

It may therefore be taken that they regard self-interest as in-born. In primitive communism, up to its last days, environment gave this human trait no ground to play on, and therefore it lay hidden. But as exchange on the borders between neighboring tribes increased, and as opportunities presented themselves for the acquisition of wealth and prestige, it commenced to assert itself and urge man to exertions in his own behalf, recking but little about his fellow beings. Under socialism environment will once more provide no incentive for this instinct to come into action. It will therefore slumber in the innermost recesses, cramped in on all sides by the many nobler motives that will blossom out, and languishing for want of nourishment.

¹ *Origin of the Family*, p. 215.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 119; *Anti-Dühring*, p. 188.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

⁵ *Origin of the Family*, p. 117.

It is sad to reflect that thinkers since Plato and Aristotle have generally entertained pessimistic views of human nature. No one has a good word for it. Of course, men like Godwin, Rousseau, and Condorcet are exceptions. They admit that human nature is bad as it displays itself under existing circumstances; but they stoutly maintain that it is capable of sublime perfection if social conditions would change for the better. Marx and Engels would perhaps range themselves among these optimists. But one cannot be certain. We find Engels stating with approval: "One thinks he is saying something great," Hegel remarks, 'if one says that mankind is by nature good; but it is forgotten that one says something far greater in the words: man is by nature evil.'" ¹

Such is human nature when viewed in the light of heredity. Men have inborn faculties, deep-seated differences, and certain persistent and dominant traits. However, according to Marx and his friend, human nature as it reveals itself in reality cannot be fully comprehended when a mere summation of these items is exhibited. Real human nature embodies the aggregate of reactions and responses of actual, living people to a particular environment pulsating with life; the mass of specific ideas, feelings, prejudices, experiences, and aims, springing from, and nourished by, a definite age and place. Divorce man from the world he lives in, and merely list the complex of the potential powers and inclinations that dwell within him, and you obtain, not a human being, but a mere abstraction.² A person's traits do not constitute a fixed, immutable apparatus that had been supplied to him at birth; on the contrary, they are plastic, they are constantly shaping themselves and are steadily undergoing serious modifications, under the impact of stimuli that come to his consciousness. As a consequence, human beings are not the same the world over and throughout the historic ages. "All history is nothing but a continual transformation of human nature,"³ and anyone who would presume to criticize or evaluate human behavior ought to "deal with human nature in general, and then with human nature as

¹ Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 84.

² *Ibid.*, p. 83.

³ Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 160.

modified in each historical epoch.”¹ Man is what he is by environment.

One of the environmental agencies that mold human character is found in the geographical conditions. Marx and Engels, however, give this point scant attention. The indirect influence of the physical surroundings, through the effect on a mode of production, they would be eager to acknowledge and to emphasize, but the direct influence receives little discussion. Engels remarks that the presence of domestic animals in certain regions of Asia had supplied, in the remote past, a milk and meat diet, and accounts for the superior development of the Aryans and the Semites; while the Indians of New Mexico had a small brain, because they were compelled to subsist on a vegetable diet. But he adds that he is not absolutely certain of the correctness of this view.² Yet Marx indicates in one passage some awareness of the influence of natural surroundings on human traits. Where, he says, nature is luxuriant in her gifts, she treats man like a child, and imposes on him no necessity of developing himself. But where she is parsimonious and exhibits caprice in the distribution of natural resources, in the variation of the quality of the soil, and in the changes of the seasons, she puts man on his guard, incites him to action, calls his abilities into constant exercise, and forces him to economize, to plan, and to enter upon all sorts of enterprises.³

Enormous efficacy in determining man's nature is ascribed to society and its institutions. Man imbibes the atmosphere created by his social environment, absorbs its traditions, assimilates its ways of envisaging things — and his character is fashioned in the process. Man needs society, he must be within it before there can be any reference to his nature. Isolated from society and its multifarious institutions and customs, he is a mere phantom, a paradox. “Man is in the most literal sense of the word a *zoön politikon*, not only a social animal, but an animal which can develop into an individual only in society.”⁴ Nursed and shaped by

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 668 n.

² *Origin of the Family*, p. 32 and n.

³ *Capital*, vol. i, 563 and n., 564 and n.

⁴ Marx, *Critique of Political Economy*, p. 268.

society, human nature in each period is an epitome, a mirroring of the distinctive characteristics and aspects of a given social organization; an ideal precipitate of the innumerable elements that constitute the essentials of social life. "But humanity (*das menschliche Wesen*) is not an abstraction dwelling in each individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the conditions of society," says Marx in his notes on Feuerbach's philosophy.¹

Each society produces therefore its own brand of human nature by casting man's potentialities into a definite configuration, and by imbuing him with ideas and feelings peculiar to its own age. The primitive communal clan produces fearless, altruistic, liberty-loving individuals. The Germans, who triumph over decadent Rome, infuse better blood into decrepit Europe, and proceed to make history on its ruins, can achieve all this, because they are a product of gens society, and not because of "an innate magic power of the German race," as the jingo historians would have it.² The eighteenth-century individual is a child of a society that saw the complete disappearance of feudalism, and that was busily introducing the capitalistic order, which had been in formation since the sixteenth century.³ The objection that socialism is impossible in practice would therefore be met by Marx and Engels with contempt. They would say: you conjure up the ghost of the human nature that will have been sent to its grave by the tumbling ruins of the capitalist order; the human nature you have in mind is only the inevitable fruit of the present vicious social organization; socialism will transform society, and human nature with it.⁴

Two modifications must be kept in mind at this juncture. To Marx, society is not an independent entity, but a resultant of the mode of production, which gives it a distinctive character and which determines its institutions. Therefore, when discussing

¹ Reprinted in Engels's *Feuerbach*, appendix 6, p. 132; cf. this work of Engels in German, p. 63.

² Engels, *Origin of the Family*, pp. 188-189.

³ Marx, *Critique of Political Economy*, p. 267; *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 125; Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 182.

⁴ A very able brief for the view that human nature is plastic will be found in Professor John Dewey's *Human Nature and Conduct*.

Marx's view as to the influence of society on man, one ought to remember that the system of production is subsumed as the hidden basic force, and that it is the productive régime which releases all the elements characterizing society and working on human nature. In the second place, with Marx and Engels society is too large and too general an entity to identify an individual by it. The direct, compelling action on man's nature is exerted by the class to which he belongs. Society lays the broad foundations and imparts color and tone to the general outlook and habits of man; but the specific traits and details are delineated by the class of which he is a member. In the strict sense, man is a product of his class, and is identified by it. His ideas and interests, aims and attitudes, his modes of conduct, his whole psyche, are those of his class. In his preface to the first volume of *Capital* (page 15) Marx declares that it is not his intention to blame individuals when he excoriates the capitalist and the landlord; they are merely the "personifications of economic categories, embodiments of particular class relations and class interests." The mode of production, the type of society it generates and of social institutions it creates, the classes it engenders — these are implied when one talks of the action Marx and Engels ascribe to social environment on man's make-up.

Among the environmental factors they also stress very emphatically the tremendous power of work in general and of occupation in particular over the formation of man's character and intellectual horizon. "By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature."¹ Work claims the bigger part of man's life; to it he devotes the major portion of his energies and abilities; it constitutes almost the whole of his small world of action and direct experience. Therefore, in proportion as his work is narrow in scope or of wide range, stimulating or monotonous, complex or simple, it develops, stunts, or leaves fallow his slumbering powers. The distinction between the porter and the philosopher is mainly the outcome of the occupational division of labor.² It is the division of labor in the factory which slaughters a world of intellectual capacities in

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 198.

² Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 140.

order to develop a detail to perfection; it is the dull, monotonous work in the country that denies full development to the agricultural laborer.¹ The petty bourgeoisie in Germany is timid and vacillating. "The *mesquin* character of its commercial transactions and its credit operations is eminently apt to stamp its character with a want of energy and enterprise."² Only variety of work can foster and give expression to the many sides of human ability and character; and under socialism, Engels promises us, this will receive attention: after half an hour of architecture the architect will devote his talents to barrow-pushing. "It will be a pretty sort of socialism that will perpetuate the profession of barrow-pushing," he exclaims.³

The efficacy of work looms so large to Engels's mind that he sees in it the principal factor that helped the monkey to become a man. This interesting morsel of anthropology he offers in one of his articles.⁴ Work is the fundamental condition of life. Ages ago, because of the requirements of work, the man-like ape discarded walking on all fours, and dedicated his hands to the sole function of work. With steady exercise, adaptation, and with the inheritance of acquired alterations, the arm gradually changed until it began to look entirely unlike the legs, and until it attained the grade of perfection to conjure up "Raphael's paintings, Thorwaldsen's statues, Paganini's music."⁵ With a variation in the structure of the arm as well as of the leg, a corresponding transformation ensued in the composition of the whole organism — in concordance with the law of physiological correlation. The development of the arm gave primitive man mastery over nature, and induced him to work in the society of his fellows, since he realized that coöperation was more fruitful of the best results. But coöperation imposes the necessity of speaking. This hardly caused any dismay, for "necessity created its organ": soon a mouth and accessories developed that had the power of articula-

¹ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 238.

² Marx, *Revolution and Counter Revolution*, p. 169.

³ *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 221-222.

⁴ "Der Anteil der Arbeit an der Menschwerdung der Affen," *Neue Zeit*, vol. xiv, no. 2, pp. 545-554.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 547.

tion.¹ Under the spur primarily of work and only secondarily of speech the brain began to develop until it reached the dimensions and quality enjoyed by man. Presently the sense organs — of sight, smell, and so forth — began to perfect themselves. Parallel to all this progress went the development of clear consciousness and of the faculty of abstraction and judgment. The monkey turned into man.

Thus with one apocryphal story Engels disposes of the scientific problem as to the origin of man, and triumphantly assures us that the reason the Darwinians could not make this wonderful discovery is that they were influenced by idealism and would not acknowledge the rôle work had played here.²

This is not an exalted philosophy of human nature. Man is a weathercock. The numerous environmental stimuli that come to his consciousness give rise to his reactions and mode of behavior, fill him with notions and illusions, and determine his character. True, he has inborn traits and dispositions; but these are merely a portion of the material of which the weathercock is made. They do not make him a creature of independent will, capable of governing and changing his environment to suit his designs, and free to choose his course of action. Man remains inert, passive, a feather to every whiff of the wind, a servant to every stimulus from outside. However, to stop here would mean to simplify the case and to suppress some further evidence available as concerns Marx's and Engels's views of human nature. They do express opinions about man's importance in historical events, and these opinions must be evaluated before we can gain a fuller understanding of their attitude. Only, as usual, their statements are scattered and are hardly consistent; they present two series of contradictory views.

On the one hand we meet declarations that bestow on man in general and on leaders will and power in all channels of activity. Men "are all endowed with consciousness; they are agents imbued with deliberation or passion, men working towards an appointed end; nothing appears without an intentional purpose,

¹ *Neue Zeit*, vol. xiv, no. 2, p. 548.

² *Ibid.*, p. 551.

without an end desired.”¹ Man’s will “is determined by passion or reflection,” by “ideal motives, zeal for honor, enthusiasm for truth and justice, personal hate, or even purely individual peculiar ideas of all kinds.”² When he goes about his labors, he follows plans laid out by him beforehand, “realizes a purpose of his own,” and at the end of the work-process he obtains a result that had already existed in his imagination. It is this fact, Marx comments, that distinguishes man’s labor from the instinctive work of the bee or of the spider.³ In one of his notes on Feuerbach he states that the materialistic doctrine that men are resultants of conditions and of education “forgets that circumstances may be altered by men and that the educator has himself to be educated. It necessarily happens therefore that society is divided into two parts, of which one is elevated above society (Robert Owen for example).”⁴

Similar views are presented about marked personalities in the domain of ideas. Wyatt and Watt helped in ushering in the Industrial Revolution.⁵ The “brilliant school of French materialists” made the eighteenth century, “in spite of all battles on land and sea won over Frenchmen by Germans and Englishmen, a pre-eminently French century, even before that crowning French Revolution.” These thinkers are referred to as the “great men, who in France prepared men’s minds for the coming revolution.”⁶ Marx declares William Petty “the father of political economy”; Engels says that this science “arose in the minds of a few geniuses of the seventeenth century,” and is really a child of the eighteenth because of the labors of the physiocrats and Adam Smith.⁷ The discovery of the labor theory of value marks “an epoch in the history of the development of the human race” — and this doubtlessly alludes to Adam Smith or Ricardo.⁸ Feuerbach, with his

¹ Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 104.

² *Ibid.*, p. 105.

³ *Capital*, vol. i, 198.

⁴ Reprinted in Engels’s *Feuerbach*, p. 130.

⁵ *Capital*, vol. i, 406, 412; Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. xxix.

⁶ Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, pp. xiii, 1-2.

⁷ *Capital*, vol. i, 299; Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 182.

⁸ *Capital*, vol. i, 85.

philosophy, "made an epoch."¹ Hegel rendered an "epoch-making service" by regarding things as in a process of growth; and his system played "an incomparably greater rôle than any earlier system," although he was "somewhat of a philistine," and although his cult of the Idea is mere "idealistic frippery" and a conglomeration of "fever phantoms."² Darwin's theory was one of the "three great discoveries which have caused our knowledge of the interdependence of the processes of nature to progress by leaps and bounds," and which resulted in a "powerful advance of science."³

Great tasks have likewise been performed in the political and social realms by men of energy and will. "Peter the Great overthrew Russian barbarism with barbarity."⁴ Napoleon "brought about within France" the conditions prerequisite for a bourgeois society, and beyond the French frontier "he swept away" the feudal régime. He also "fixed and regulated," within France, the conditions under which the farmer could cultivate the land that had fallen to him after the Revolution, thereby introducing small farming, which was at the beginning of the nineteenth century the "condition for the emancipation and enrichment of the French rural population," which "deprived feudalism of all nutriment," and which was "a buttress of the bourgeoisie against every stroke of the old overlords."⁵ Robert Owen was the guiding spirit of labor, and "every real advance in England on behalf of the workers links itself on to the name of Robert Owen. . . . He forced through in 1819, after five years of fighting, the first law limiting the hours of labor of women and children in factories He introduced as transition measures to the complete communistic organization of society" coöperative societies and labor bazars.⁶

In counterposition to such pronouncements we find in Marx and Engels an abundance of statements that express an opposite view. Man and his will, leaders and their efforts, are belittled.

¹ Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*, appendix, p. 194.

² Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 45, 65; Feuerbach, pp. 46, 96.

³ Feuerbach, pp. 99, 101; *Anti-Dühring*, p. 104.

⁴ Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*, appendix, p. 201.

⁵ Marx, *18th Brumaire*, pp. 10, 148-150.

⁶ Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, pp. 25-26.

Individuals are declared to be deluded by all species of erroneous ideas, and to be incapable of grasping the true nature of occurrences around them. In the productive pursuits men enter definite relations "independent of their will."¹ Their everyday choices as consumers are determined, not by their own deliberations, but by their social position and by the entire social organization; this explains why the worker wants potatoes and the kept woman desires lace.² Leaders fare no better. An analysis of the inventions of the eighteenth century would demonstrate that they were due very little to the work of a single individual.³ "Man makes his own history, but he does not make it out of the whole cloth; he does not make it out of conditions chosen by himself, but out of such as he finds at hand."⁴ Revolutions are not due to the ill will of a few agitators, but to persistent social wants, the gratification of which is suppressed by outworn institutions; and the failure of an uprising is not to be ascribed to "the accidental efforts, talents, faults, errors, or treacheries of some of the leaders," but to the general conditions of existence of the nations convulsed.⁵ The dreams of the eighteenth-century French philosophers of justice, inalienable rights, and the rule of reason found their expression, after the Revolution, merely in the iniquities of the bourgeois régime; for these philosophers "could, no more than their predecessors, go beyond the limits imposed upon them by their epoch."⁶ Neither the statesman nor the thinker, neither the leader nor the revolutionary can cause society to raise itself by its bootstraps.

In general, Marx is unduly critical in his estimates of important persons, and is eager to belittle their accomplishments. Where others would see cause for praise, he discerns only weakness and faults, although at times his criticism is well to the point — as far as it goes. Burke is "the celebrated sophist and sycophant," the "execrable political cant-monger." "This sycophant, who in

¹ Marx, *Critique of Political Economy*, p. 11; *18th Brumaire*, p. 48.

Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*, pp. 44-45.

Capital, vol. i, 406 n.

Marx, *18th Brumaire*, p. 9.

Marx, *Revolution and Counter Revolution*, pp. 14-16.

Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, pp. 3-4.

the pay of the English oligarchy played the romantic *laudator temporis acti* against the French Revolution, just as, in the pay of the North American colonies . . . he had played the Liberal against the English oligarchy, was an out-and-out vulgar bourgeois." ¹ Bentham is "the arch-philistine Jeremy Bentham, that insipid, pedantic, leather-tongued oracle of the ordinary bourgeois intelligence of the nineteenth century"; "a genius in the way of bourgeois stupidity." ² Cobden and Bright are no more than "manufacturers"; just "Boring, Bright and Company," in whom people have "their worst enemies and the most shameless hypocrites"; who are crusading for free trade solely because it spells good profits. ³ Locke is but "an advocate of the new bourgeoisie in all forms, the manufacturers against the working classes and paupers, the commercial class against the old-fashioned usurers, the financial aristocracy against the state debtors." ⁴ Malthus is "that master in plagiarism," the producer of a "pasquinade." ⁵ Macaulay is a "Scotch sycophant and fine talker." ⁶ McLeod, "who has taken upon himself to dress up the confused ideas of Lombard Street in the most learned finery, is a successful cross between the superstitious mercantilists and the enlightened Free Trade bagmen." ⁷ J. S. Mill is a vulgar economist on page 654, but is exonerated on page 669. ⁸ "He is as much at home in absurd contradictions as he feels at sea in the Hegelian contradiction, the source of all dialectic." ⁹ Napoleon III is a "mutton-head," who "carried on regular blackmail"; "an old and crafty roué." ¹⁰ Roscher "seldom loses an occasion of registering, in black and white, ingenious apologetic fancies." ¹¹ Count Rumford, the famous American physicist, is "an American humbug, the baron-

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 354, 833 n.

² *Ibid.*, p. 668 and n.

³ *Poverty of Philosophy*, appendix, p. 209; *Capital*, vol. i, 19; *Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich*, p. 84.

⁴ *Critique of Political Economy*, p. 93.

⁵ *Capital*, vol. i, 556 n.; *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 194.

⁶ *Capital*, vol. i, 300 n.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁸ *Ibid.*, n.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 654 n.

¹⁰ *18th Brumaire*, pp. 11, 81, 83.

¹¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 229 n.

ized Yankee.”¹ J. B. Say is the vulgarizer of Adam Smith; “the dull J. B. Say”; “this comical ‘*prince de la science*,’” whose “merits consisted rather of the impartiality with which he equally misunderstood his contemporaries, Malthus, Sismondi and Ricardo.”² Senior is a vulgar economist who substituted “for an economic category a sycophantic phrase — *voilà tout*,” of abstinence, and who presumes that “the world still jogs on solely through the self-chastisement of this modern penitent of Vishnu, the capitalist.”³ “Adam Smith applied the Scotch saying that ‘mony mickles mak a muckle’ even to his spiritual wealth, and therefore concealed with petty care the sources to which he owed the little out of which he tried to make so much. More than once he prefers to break off the point of the discussion, whenever he feels that an attempt on his part clearly to formulate the question would compel him to settle his accounts with his predecessors.”⁴ Thiers stands on a “mean, petty pedestal”; is an “historical shoeblack” of Napoleon I; is “a master in small state roguery, a virtuoso in perjury and treason, a craftsman in all the petty stratagems, cunning devices, and base perfidies of parliamentary party warfare; . . . with class prejudices standing him in the place of ideas, and vanity in the place of a heart; his private life as infamous as his public life is odious.”⁵ Arthur Young is “an unutterable statistical prattler,” “whose reputation is in the inverse ratio of his merit.”⁶

Examples can enlarge these two contradictory lists, and can show that praise is meted out in one connection and derision in another, even to the same person or movement. However, if we have in mind Marx’s and Engels’s general outlook upon historical forces, and if we read the statements in their context and spirit, the sharpness of the contradictions begins to wane, and we discern some method in this madness.

There is in their mind a fundamental distinction drawn between

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 659.

² *Critique of Political Economy*, p. 123.

³ *Capital*, vol. i, 654-655.

⁴ *Critique of Political Economy*, p. 232.

⁵ *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 200; *Civil War in France*, pp. 54-56. Thus to Thiers for having squelched the Paris Commune!

⁶ *Capital*, vol. i, 301 n., 254 n.

the everyday life of individuals and the general course of history; between the short-time personal incidents and the march of human destinies as viewed over long ages. They are aware that in his everyday life, in the pursuit of his usual engagements, the ordinary person is not the feather to every blow of the wind of circumstance, and not merely the obedient victim of external stimuli. He is generally a man of judgment and designs, of ideals, whims, and passions. Not infrequently he deliberates, chooses, and follows his plans. To some extent he is a man with a will. But the progress of universal history is a different matter. On the surface it may appear as a display of fluctuating, haphazard, unpredictable acts controlled by vacillating human fancy; but at bottom it is steered by definite, persistent, universal laws. It is human history; yet it is governed by inexorable laws just as nature is.¹ In history, not man's will is the determining cause, but the external, silent forces operating with iron necessity and moving toward an irresistible goal. These forces are chiefly the system of production and the dialectic. Men make history, true; only they make it, not of their free wills, but in compliance with the imperial dictates of the material economic conditions. History is made under conditions not chosen but found close at hand. "Man proposes and God (to wit, the outside force of the capitalistic method of production) disposes."²

As to great men and leaders. They cannot resist the tide of general conditions about them, cannot turn away from their courses the historical currents, and launch them into new channels. They are powerless to tear up the network of forces woven by the enduring action of consistent laws, and insert warps and wefts of their own making. Prominent personalities are in no position to create problems utterly out of harmony with the requirements of the times, nor can they offer solutions to existing problems which would go athwart social currents, or which are not intimated by social reality. New problems and their solutions arise only when circumstances ripen them.³ If it is true, Engels

¹ Engels, *Feuerbach*, pp. 104-105.

² Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 258.

³ Marx, *Critique of Political Economy*, p. 12; Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. 77.

exclaims, that a great man can lead to new deeds and to decisive action regardless of the historical necessities, "he might just as well have been born five hundred years earlier and saved mankind the mistakes, conflicts and sorrows of five hundred years."¹ A true leader can merely understand the nature of the forces that operate on a given occasion, interpret the signs of the time, and urge suitable action. He can play the agent behaving in unison with them and doing their bidding faithfully.

In this sense each social epoch needs leaders. But Marx agrees with Helvetius that, if it does not find them, it invents them.² That a great man, and precisely this one, appears at such a moment and in such a country is obviously pure accident, writes Engels in one of his last letters. Suppress him, and there will be a demand for a substitute; and a substitute will come, generally. That Napoleon was precisely the sort of military dictator the French Republic, exhausted by wars, needed, was an accident. In case a Napoleon is lacking, somebody else will take the place. This is proved by the fact that each time the man was found as soon as the need arose: recall Caesar, Augustus, Cromwell. Marx discovered the materialistic conception of history; but Thierry, Mignet, Guizot, and all the English historians prior to 1850 prove that there was a drift toward such a theory. And the discovery of the same conception by the American, Lewis Morgan, demonstrates that the time was ripe for it, and that it had to be discovered.³ At best the leader can retard or accelerate the development of a given single incident. He cannot modify long-run historical consequences. Marx writes to Kugelmann that accidents play a part in history, only they are compensated by the effects of other accidents; further, "acceleration and retardation are very much dependent on such accidents, and among these figures the accident of the character of the people who stand at the head of a movement."⁴

¹ *Anti-Dühring*, p. 39.

² Marx, *Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich*, p. 70.

³ Letter of January 25, 1894, reprinted in A. Labriola's *Socialisme et philosophie*, p. 260.

⁴ *Neue Zeit*, vol. xx, no. 1, p. 710.

One may inquire, if in his everyday conduct an individual pursues his own will and choice, why can we not assume that the summations of these wills acting in the multifarious directions serve as immediate or remote causes of the world phenomena, and constitute, in fact, the very essence of history? Is not history an agglomeration of events; are not these events connected with the lives of individuals, with their everyday aims and aspirations; and is not, therefore, history the history and the fruit of individual will?

No, says Engels. The purposes and wills of individuals do not all flow in one direction, swelling into a big movement, and culminating in historical events. They course rather in numberless different paths, interfere and conflict with each other, criss-cross and modify one another. As a consequence, either "these ends are utterly incapable of realization"; or "the results of many individual wills produce effects for the most part quite other than what is wished — often, in fact, the very opposite"; or "the ends of the actions are intended, but the results which follow from the actions are not intended." The actual historical event, then, is not a product of human will at all. "That which is willed but rarely happens . . . the innumerable conflicts of individual wills and individual agents in the realm of history reach a conclusion which is on the whole analogous to that in the realm of nature — which is without definite purpose."¹

The individual is accordingly a rather insignificant unit for historical purposes. He has inborn traits, he follows his designs; but, at bottom, he is molded by the all-powerful environment, and is enveloped in a cocoon of notions and illusions transmitted to him. He is not fit to be a maker of history. Only as a member of his class can he identify himself as an historical agent. When isolated he is without historical value, when multiplied into a class he begins to count. The individual is drowned in the class. This way of looking at things is frequently observed; those who minimize the individual and his significance in world movements revere the group and talk in terms of the "pack."

¹ *Feuerbach*, pp. 104-106.

To make history, to act on the historical stage is the mission and function of the class. Engels declares:

If, therefore, we set out to discover the impelling forces which . . . stand behind historical figures, and constitute the true final impulses of history, we cannot consider so much the motives of single individuals, however pre-eminent, as those which set in motion great masses, entire nations, and again, whole classes of people in each nation, and this, too, not in a momentarily flaring and quickly dying flame, but to enduring action culminating in a great historical change.¹

This does not imply that a class is possessed of "free will," and that it can make history in a capricious and wayward manner.² Marx and Engels are far from such a view. To them, the class is the true agent that reads the workings of the hidden, objective elements in society, that understands their instructions, and that is qualified to act in accordance with them and to struggle for the progress of civilization. "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles."

¹ Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 108.

² Engels, *Grundsätze des Kommunismus*, p. 23.

CHAPTER VI

THE CLASS AND CLASS STRUGGLE

WHAT is a class? What is the nature of the class struggle? What are the fundamental causes of such phenomena? Over these questions interpreters and critics of Marx have labored a good deal and have waged heated controversies. Marx and Engels discuss these questions in many a connection, but here again they hardly go to the heart of the matter, and they leave much that is puzzling. As with other problems, they content themselves with generalities that would appear plausible and reasonable to the casual reader. They avoid the vexing difficulties, and hardly take pains to clarify the concepts they employ and to reveal the many-sided aspects of the situations they examine.

Marx commenced an analysis of classes in the last chapter of the third volume of his *Capital*, but he never finished the chapter. One does not know whether to regret this circumstance or to rejoice over it, for frequently, when he expatiated on a subject and completed it, the harvest was more bountiful in confusion, contradictions, and obscurities.

He warns us in this chapter that the identity of the source of income is not a criterion that could aid in distinguishing classes. This identity merely points to the groupings in what he terms "social division of labor." Classes and social division of labor are not to be confused. The latter refers to the occupational division of labor, to the segmentation of society into groups pursuing various callings. The different kinds of employments can be classified into genera (as agriculture, manufacture), species, subspecies; and the prerequisite for an elaborate scheme of division is a large and especially a dense population. In communal society the choice of an occupation is governed mainly by age and sex; while among tribes that trade with each other the basis of division of labor is imposed by the natural environment and resources. Plants and animals are differentiated into genera and species by nature's

methods; in society the trade of the father is inherited by the son, and in course of time this inheritance becomes regulated by custom and law. In India there is the ossification into castes; in the Middle Ages trades are petrified into guilds, and when further division of labor becomes imperative, old guilds split into new ones that engage in subdivisions of a trade.

With the advent of capitalism, not law but competition determines the distribution and the proportionality of groups. There is no external authority to supervise, and, to all appearance, chance and caprice hold sway; however, there persists an invisible but mighty controlling force — the market price, which works silently but steadily for the establishment or the redressing of the equilibrium. Here, too, society is likened to nature: competition, the *bellum omnium contra omnes*, preserves the species in the struggle for existence. It determines how many can profitably stay in the same occupation, and who is to change to another.¹ Such chance comparisons of social division of labor, and in another connection of human labor,² to phenomena of nature have led some, notably Professor L. Woltmann, to maintain that Marx's is essentially a biological or anthropological interpretation of society and social evolution.³ This is far-fetched. Marx's idea of evolution runs along entirely different lines.

Accordingly, physicians and clerks, farmers and miners, are not distinct classes; they are merely groups in the social division of labor.⁴ Would republicans and democrats, conservatives and liberals, pacifists and militarists constitute classes? No. Marx does not intend to render class and political party synonymous. Neither would a divergence of economic views divide society into Marxian classes; free traders and protectionists, supporters of organized labor and its opponents, are not the classes he has in mind. Some define a Marxian class as a group of people who find themselves in the same economic condition. But this criterion is too general and too vague. Organized skilled labor in command of

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 373, 385-386; *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 147.

² *Capital*, vol. i, 198.

³ Woltmann, *Der historische Materialismus*, pp. 188 ff., 212 ff., 323 ff.

⁴ *Capital*, vol. iii, 1032.

bargaining power is in a different economic condition from that occupied by the unorganized and unskilled masses of workers. The opulent lawyer with an extensive business clientele and the minister who depends for his modest living on the allowance of the parish are hardly in the same economic condition. Yet in neither case would Marx see two disparate classes.

For the study of the nature of classes we must turn our attention to what Marx terms the economic or the social relations of production (*Produktionsverhältnisse*). He employs this concept to designate two distinct facts. On the one hand, it comprises such connections and objective relations among the members of society or among the phenomena of a given era as are the peculiar resultants, and simultaneously the significant characteristics, of the prevailing system of production. For example, in present society division of labor, the workshop, money, capital, surplus-value are relations of production.¹

However, this use of the term does not interest us here. It is the other fact to which this concept refers that is of valuable assistance, the fact of the subjective, personal relations among the producing agents. Under any given mode of production the direct participators in the processes of making goods maintain various relations to one another, and on diverse terms.² In each productive enterprise and in the performance of their daily tasks not all men enjoy the same status. Not all perform the same functions, play the same rôle, and possess the same amount of freedom and authority. Some work, others supervise; some command, others obey; some own the property involved in the processes, others do not. The specific nature of these personal relations is vitally connected with the mode of production or with the productive forces. When these change, the relations will alter accordingly. "Any change arising in the productive forces of men necessarily effects a change in their relations of production."³

¹ Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*, pp. 87, 145; *Capital*, vol. i, 839, vol. iii, 952.

² Marx, *Wage-Labor and Capital*, pp. 28 ff.; *Capital*, vol. iii, 952.

³ Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 133. The English translation has "conditions of production," but the original, written by Marx in French, has *rappports de production*. See also *Capital*, vol. i, 326, vol. iii, 919. The German word *Verhältnisse*

The relations among the individuals figuring in the work of production are the source of economic classes. And the elements which impart precision to these relations and which, in other words, serve as criteria of a class, are two: property ownership and personal freedom.

First, as to property. Property in general is not in question here. The humble wage-earner may own a cottage, while the wealthy manufacturer may dwell in a rented mansion. The ownership of the means of production is meant — of buildings, raw materials, appliances, and machinery. This ownership gives the economic relations a definite stamp, and for this reason Marx employs the two interchangeably. “At a certain stage . . . the material forces of production in society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or — what is but a legal expression for the same thing — with the property relations within which they had been at work before.”¹ With him, “to define bourgeois property is nothing other than to explain all the social relations of bourgeois production.”² To the question what were the relations of modern bourgeois property “one could only reply by a critical analysis of political economy, embracing the whole of the relations of property, not in their juridical expression as relations of will, but in their real form as relations of material production.”³

The property relations enable one to identify the classes existing in a society of any given historical period. Those who own the property needed in the processes of production constitute one class; the persons who do not own it form another. The posses-

may mean conditions as well as relations, and the expression *Produktionsverhältnisse* may designate conditions of production or relations of production. It is essential to distinguish which of these Marx had in mind, but there is no way of making the meaning certain. The context is not always a safe guide. The English translations are careless in some places, especially in *Poverty of Philosophy*, *e. g.*, pp. 133, 175, and most likely, in the last pages of *Capital*, vol. iii, *e. g.*, pp. 1022-1024, where “conditions of production” should, in some sentences, be replaced by “relations of production.”

¹ *Critique of Political Economy*, p. 12.

² *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 168.

³ *Ibid.*, appendix, p. 195. Cf. *Communist Manifesto*, p. 19, and *Capital*, vol. i, 722.

sion of the means of production places the owners in a position of power in relation to the non-owning workers. They dictate terms and exact a toll from the propertyless toilers for the privilege of using these means of production. The result is that one class does not work, but obtains an income by filching part of the labor of the direct producers; the other class is toiling, but it does not receive the full product of its labor. Property is the right to rob part of other men's labor; it is an instrument of coercing others to sweat for the owner. The peasant working on his land receives a return which can be separated into wages, profits, and rent. The wages represent what he, as a hired laborer, could earn for his work. The other two portions represent surplus-labor which, if he were a hired laborer, he would have to relinquish to his employer. The reason he retains this surplus is not that he labors, but that he happens to be the owner of the land and the other property essential in the performance of his task. He owns, therefore he retains the toll.¹

In the primitive gens all property was owned by the community, therefore there were no classes. Likewise, socialism will know no class stratification, and for the same reason. "With the difference in distribution, however, class differences are introduced. Society becomes divided into upper and lower classes, into plunderers and plundered, into master and servant classes."² In capitalistic society, for example, some individuals own the means of production, while others are destitute of them. Hence two classes linked by a wage relationship; and, "So long as the relation of wage labor to capital is permitted to exist . . . there will always be a class which exploits and a class which is exploited," Marx assures us.³ Property ownership is the rock on which society is rent into classes.

The relations emanating from the possession and non-possession of property enable us to discern the classes in a society dominated by a given productive form. But it does not aid in throwing light on the distinctive features of the classes as they existed in the course of history. Neither the slave in Greece, for instance, nor

¹ *Capital*, vol. iii, 1020-1021.

² Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 178.

³ *Poverty of Philosophy*, appendix, p. 224.

the modern proletariat owns the means of production. Yet they are not to be taken as members of one and the same class. When we talk of the slave and the proletariat, of the Greek master and the modern bourgeois, we are not dealing with two Marxian classes but with four. Why?

Here we come to the second element, closely allied with the first, which characterizes personal relations of production and which puts a specific impress on classes — the amount of freedom and authority enjoyed by the classes already formed by the property relations. The ownership of the means of production not only bestows perfect liberty on the owner, but also endows him with some power of dominance over the freedom of the non-possessors. The slave is not only no owner of the property needed in production, he is also deprived of the freedom to dispose of his person as he pleases. He does not enjoy independence. The master has complete control over him, and owns him just as any other means of production. The slave is an object, a mere chattel. The modern laborer possesses no means of production, either, but he is a free agent. He has the liberty to conduct himself as he sees fit, and as a freeman he can enter into contractual relations with the capitalist.¹ The employer has no authority over his behavior. Of course the capitalist can, by shutting the factory, withdraw at will the property indispensable in production, render the laborer idle, and deprive him of the means of gaining a livelihood. In other words, the employer has under his control the means of maintaining the worker's life. However, over his personal freedom he has no power; after work, the laborer can live as he pleases. The relations of production in the Middle Ages lead to classes that occupy a middle position. The serf is not a slave, yet he is not as free as the modern proletarian; he is attached to the soil, and cannot leave his lord at will and without ceremony. The same holds, although in a different manner, of the journeyman. 'Personal dependence here characterizes the social relations of production.'² Likewise with respect to property. The serf possesses the land and the appliances he uses in his work, but he is

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 186-187; Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 142.

² *Capital*, vol. i, 89.

not their absolute owner, for the lord has his prerogative in this matter.¹

We arrive, then, at this conclusion. A definite mode of production is correlated with particular individual relations into which the participants in the work in any phase of industry enter. These relations are characterized primarily by the type of ownership of the property requisite in the processes of making the commodity, and by the degree of freedom exercised by the living agents. These relations, and so characterized, furnish the key to the classes into which a given society is divided. Each system of production carries with it its peculiar classes. With a change in the mode of producing goods, the relations of production change, and with them the type of classes.² Marx promises that revolutionary socialism will finally lead to "the abolition of class distinctions, the abolition of social relations of production on which they rest."³ One may define, then, a class as a group of people who, in a given society, with a given régime of production, are finding themselves in the same position with reference to two things: the ownership or non-ownership of the property essential in the labor-processes, and second, the personal freedom enjoyed or deprived of. Marx nowhere adequately explains this view, but that it is his view, his scattered discussions make fairly certain.

It does not follow that a given society will necessarily have two classes only. In some historical periods the mode of production may not be perfectly homogeneous, but may fall into two distinct departments. In each department the relations of production may be different, and therefore in each one there is a set of two classes. In the Middle Ages agriculture and industry rested on foundations quite remote from one another. The country and the city were two separate provinces of production. Hence two sets of classes, "lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman"⁴ — one set in the country and another in the city. Similarly, in modern society Marx regards the landowners as a distinct third class

¹ *Capital*, vol. iii, 921.

² Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. xix; *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 48, 183.

³ *Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich*, p. 94.

⁴ *Communist Manifesto*, p. 12.

alongside the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Marx perhaps has in mind Germany and England of the early nineteenth century, where agriculture was not as yet on a fully capitalistic basis, and exhibited many earmarks of feudalism. In England, for example, the landlords entered into a different productive relation; they rented the land to capitalist farmers, who in their turn hired workers and exploited them.¹

One may aver that this theory of classes is faced with a difficulty. Marx talks of the struggle between the feudal nobility and the industrial bourgeoisie, and refers to them as two classes in society at war with each other. He also holds that the latter class was oppressed by the other, and therefore it sought emancipation. Now this case does not harmonize with the criteria of classes as advanced in the foregoing analysis. The bourgeoisie and the landed nobles were no participants in the same productive processes; they did not enter into any personal relations of production. One class here did not have possession of the means of production that the other class needed in its work; nor did it wield any authority over the personal freedom of the members of the other. The nobles and the bourgeoisie, in other words, were no allies in the productive tasks; and the one class was in no position to exact any toll, like surplus-labor, for turning over to the other the means of production. On the contrary, they were two independent classes, two distinct strata within one society, each one with its own sphere of production, and each one with its own subordinate class. The feudal lord had the serf, and the bourgeois, the proletariat. The two criteria proposed above do not apply, and yet Marx talks here of two classes, one dominating the other.

This is not a fatal difficulty. Each society generates within itself the makings of its successor. When the old order begins to die out, the new one gains in vigor, and there is the inevitable struggle for supremacy between the upholders of each régime. While the two systems overlap, the dominant classes of both systems find themselves side by side, the former creating difficulties for the latter by fettering its adventures with the instruments

¹ *Capital*, vol. iii, 725.

of the old order; therefore both compete for power. At the end of the Middle Ages modern capitalism was born, and the bourgeois class appeared. The feudal lord, wielding his ancient, although waning, prerogative, strove to maintain the old system; whereas the bourgeois, oppressed by the feudal institutions, sought to create conditions favorable to his prosperous existence. The two classes did not belong to the same society. The one was a product of the old, dying régime, and the other was the supporter of the new order. The noble represented feudal society, and the bourgeois stood for nascent capitalism. But they met at the juncture of the two régimes, and they clashed.

A class, in the Marxian sense, does not come into existence full-fledged. It has to go through a whole process of evolution. In a young, unsettled country classes cannot acquire a permanent character at all, because conditions are in a constant flux. Spectacular opportunities are offered to eager, energetic people; as a consequence social groups continually change their nature, and their constituent elements swiftly shift from one status to another.¹ But in a country more or less settled two stages are discerned in the development of a class. At first, the class is a class solely because it is a physical entity, a group in contradistinction to another group which enjoys an entirely different position in the relations of production. It is a class in so far as it finds itself in face of another one. There is as yet no cohesive force among the members composing it. There is no class consciousness, no keen appreciation of the oneness of their interests, and no collective antagonism to the other class.

This stage is prevalent throughout the youthful period of a given era of production, when the productive forces peculiar to it are not yet fully grown; when, consequently, the material conditions of existence do not disclose in sharp outlines the miseries saddled upon one class by the other, do not accentuate the alignment of interests, and do not point in unmistakable terms to the inevitable course of class action. At such a stage Marx finds, for example, the German working class before the convulsions of

¹ Marx, *18th Brumaire*, pp. 21-22.

1848. It was, he says, as far behind the English and French workers in political and social development as the German bourgeoisie was behind its *confrères* in the more advanced countries. In those days the capitalist mode of production had not progressed far enough in Germany to liberate forces adequate to foster a strong proletarian class arrayed against a mighty bourgeoisie. The two were classes merely because they found themselves as two disparate entities in the relations of production.¹

Similarly, the agricultural groups everywhere are subject to conditions of work which perpetually tend to keep the producers at this unripe stage, and which hold little promise of hastening their evolution into a genuine class. Marx discusses the position of the French farming population before 1848. Although the interests of the farmers were identical, there was no consciousness of this fact on their part, no organization, and no unity of conduct. Each one tilled his parcel of land, and was self-sufficient, because his struggle with nature provided for all his wants. He lived far from his neighbors, compelled to forego the luxury of social intercourse with his fellow beings. The family and the farm constituted an isolated unit; a collection of these made a village; and a group of villages composed a department. The farmers as a whole represented merely a sum of magnitudes, "much as a bag with potatoes constitutes a potato-bag." They formed a class only in so far as they were facing another class in the population; but *per se*, they were not welded into a close, self-conscious unit. Marx generalizes:

In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions that separate their mode of life, their interests and their culture from those of the other classes, and that place them in an attitude hostile toward the latter, they constitute a class; in so far as there exists only a local connection among these farmers, a connection which the individuality and exclusiveness of their interests prevent from generating among them any unity of interest, national connections, and political organization, they do not constitute a class.²

At this early stage the economic reality is thoroughly inadequate to offer a class competent instruction as to its legitimate

¹ *Revolution and Counter Revolution*, pp. 22-23.

² *Ibid.*, p. 25; *18th Brumaire*, pp. 144-145.

historical mission, and specific guidance as to its impending tasks and immediate policies. With uncertain economic environment is correlated unsteady human behavior. There are momentary and desultory collisions with the enemy class, there are haphazard schemes and half-hearted measures attempted. But there is no consistent class policy, and no stern class struggle. The leaders of the oppressed class can only weave utopias and improvise bizarre theories.¹ The proletarians are satisfied with things as they are, and they hardly realize that society is beset with evils and iniquities. In the early days of capitalist England, Engels complains, the workers would turn a deaf ear to the cries of Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Owen that society was built on an unjust system of distribution. The material elements were too unripe to open their eyes to prevailing wrongs.² The contest, if it is carried on at all, is waged by individual members of the class or by small groups, and not by the class as a unit; against one or more members of the enemy, but not against the whole enemy class. The down-trodden laborers do not discern the causes of trouble, and often direct their opposition to accidental and apparent sources of evil. Frequently, without perceiving it, they allow themselves to be enlisted into fighting the battles of their adversaries. They are divided, unorganized, and with no clear comprehension of their interests. "Thus this mass is already a class, as opposed to capital, but not yet for itself."³

The second stage emerges when the class becomes a class *per se*, and not solely because it is an entity in juxtaposition to another class. This occurs when the mode of production has passed well beyond its period of adolescence and has reached the zenith of its maturity, when "the method of production has traveled a good portion of its upward progress, when half of its life was over."⁴ Then the productive forces are in full bloom. They begin to reveal the antitheses embedded in the existing order, to furnish intimations and signs of a new and better system, and to prepare the raw material that will go into the making of the coming so-

¹ *Communist Manifesto*, pp. 54-55.

² *Anti-Dühring*, p. 179.

³ Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 189.

⁴ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 179-180.

ciety. The existing régime is brazenly replete with shortcomings. It is breeding ceaselessly new frictions and contradictions, and it discloses to clear view the ghastly mechanism by which the social order works to the detriment of one class and to the aggrandizement of the other. The ripened material conditions throw a flood of light before the abused class, disclosing the source of its sufferings, and indicating the inevitable methods to be employed for its emancipation.

The oppressed class finds a safe guide and instructor in the material environment, in the fully evolved productive forces. Under such tutelage it matures into a class *par excellence*. It no longer gropes amidst uncertainties for the true nature of its interests. Its members begin to realize that they are all thrown into the identical economic position. The blows they receive from the oppressing enemies consolidate them into a homogeneous unit. In the class they begin to see their tower of strength, and in terms of the class they begin to think. They become class conscious, and effect a close-knit organization. Marx emphasizes that the proletarians will form no class unless organized, and the *Communist Manifesto* promises that "The immediate aim of the communists is the . . . formation of the proletariat as a class."¹ The instruments of organization are strikes, labor combinations; well-developed railway communications, which bring workers of various localities together and acquaint them with their common interests, are of great service.²

The class no longer wavers as to the proper course of action, since the guide is at hand. The progressively developing productive forces are destined to prepare the ground for a new order; but they are hampered in their evolution by the old mode of production. This deep-seated antithesis teaches the class what road it can best follow: it teaches that the struggle for the abolition of the old system, and for the hastening of the inauguration of the new

¹ Page 30. "There is one element of success that the workers possess: its great numbers. But numbers will weigh in the balance only when united by organization and guided by knowledge." Marx, *Inauguraladresse der internationalen Arbeiter-Association*, p. 29.

² *Communist Manifesto*, pp. 24-25; Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 189; *Revolution and Counter Revolution*, p. 20.

one, is the only sure means leading to emancipation. In this struggle it finds its salvation and its inspiration. It becomes so thoroughly grounded in the complexities of the social mechanism and in the intricacies of their workings that it draws from them solid knowledge as to its interests, admirable guidance for infallible procedure, and the exhilarating assurance that only the coming new order can end all ills.

It consequently enters upon a definite and consistent line of tactics, works relentlessly toward its goal, never swerving from its chosen path to any fruitless contrivances. It scorns henceforth the old utopias and half measures concocted by learned men. It knows better. Desultory conflicts give way to studied, purposeful struggles. A contest carried on even by a handful of members, and in an isolated section of the country, is clothed with the dignity of class war in behalf of class interests and in favor of the newly evolving social system. Of course, these scattered collisions are intended to be mere training exercises, a mere prelude to the mighty cataclysm which will descend on the old régime and shatter it to ruins, over which a new society will see the dawn of a new career.

Strongly conscious of its interests, fully instructed of its methods, steadfast in its purpose, resolute in its struggle, ever pushing to its goal, unified, organized — this is a Marxian class.¹

The prevalent impression is that Marx arbitrarily divides each society into two classes. This is hardly a correct view. He does not range mankind in a front line, inspect it, and appoint those on his right as members of one class and those on his left as members of the other. Where economic conditions have not solidified and have not assumed definite form, society consists of many classes. In 1848 Marx saw in Germany, where capitalistic conditions had not matured yet, no fewer than eight classes — the landed classes, as feudal lords, rich farmers, small freeholders, and feudal tenants; the industrial classes, like the bourgeoisie and petty traders; and the proletarians, as the wage-earners and the

¹ Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*, pp. 136-137, 188-190; *Communist Manifesto*, pp. 23-24; *18th Brumaire*, p. 145.

agricultural laborers.¹ In Austria at the same period he saw the serfs, the factory operatives, the journeymen, the merchants, the manufacturers, the intellectuals, — and “not a single class satisfied.”² In France, likewise, he found the financial aristocracy, the industrial bourgeoisie, the small traders, the intellectuals, the parsons’ class, the proletariat, the landlords, the free farmers, etc.³ Even in England, which furnished the classical example of capitalism, there were no definite class boundaries, and one class shaded into another.⁴

However, this vast multiplicity of classes does not endure in modern society. As capitalist production advances, the numerous classes converge into fewer and stronger ones, the transition shades are obliterated, and the boundary lines become well marked. Then some of the previous independent classes range themselves as mere sub-groups or subdivisions of the few outstanding ones. The “three great classes” of modern society are the landlords, the capitalists, and the proletarians.⁵ The first two are the upper classes, the last is the lowest one. Midway between these two extremes is the fourth class, namely, the lower middle class, comprising the petty traders, the shopkeepers, the independent handicraftsmen, and the small farmers. They work themselves, and also employ some labor. They form the transition between the upper and the lower tiers of society, and partake of the nature of both. The interests of the other two strata are amalgamated in this middle layer, but are dulled in the fusion. This class aspires to rise to the ranks of the bourgeois class, but it fears that circumstances may cast it into the lower. It therefore feels uncertain of its ground, is timid in its policies and tactics, and is vacillating in its allegiance in times of crises. It may align itself with the proletariat; but when the tide turns in favor of the wealthier contestants, it abandons the post and joins the stronger side. It shuns direct responsibility in time of action, is satisfied with half measures, fears a decisive stand, and when finally the

¹ *Revolution and Counter Revolution*, pp. 17-25.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

³ *18th Brumaire*, p. 20 and *passim*.

⁴ *Capital*, vol. iii, 1031.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 1031, 725; *Critique of Political Economy*, pp. 9, 305.

smoke clears over the stilled battlefield, it is satisfied that the matter is settled, after a fashion indeed, but settled at last. Marx wastes no love on this class for its behavior during the uprisings of 1848.¹

But after capitalist society had reached its zenith and commenced to drift toward disintegration, even these four classes dwindle to two. The landlords and the bourgeoisie weld into one. In the course of time agriculture becomes progressively bourgeois, for it pursues capitalistic methods of production and exploits wage labor. The landlord becomes to all intents and purposes a capitalist. Marx fully realizes this. In 1852 he said that "large landed property, despite its feudal coquetry and pride of race, has become completely bourgeois through the development of modern society";² and in 1871 he stated that "the landlord now is but a sleeping partner of the capitalist." Obedient to the laws of capitalistic development, agricultural establishments meet the same fate as the industrial; through concentration and centralization both decrease in number and merge into a few gigantic concerns, ready to be taken over by the socialist state.

While the landlord merges into the capitalist class, the petty bourgeoisie is doomed to extinction altogether. With the unfolding of the productive forces, the concentration of capital in individual establishments grows on a larger and larger scale, the methods of production become more complicated, and competition grows progressively fiercer. The petty capitalist with his limited means and skill is unable to maintain his position in the savage competitive battle. He is cast out, and sinks into the ranks of the workers, supplying "the proletariat with fresh elements of enlightenment and progress."³

Only two classes remain ultimately. At one pole is the bourgeois class, "the masters," "the oppressors," "the exploiters." It contains the industrial entrepreneurs, the merchants, the financiers, and the landowners. At the other pole is the class of proletarians, who own nothing but labor power. Here belong the town

¹ *Revolution and Counter Revolution*, pp. 21, 154, 169; *18th Brumaire*, p. 57.

² *Ibid.*, p. 49.

³ *Communist Manifesto*, pp. 23, 26, 45-46; *Marx, Wage-Labor and Capital*, p. 53.

wage-earners and the agricultural laborers. These two classes will meet in battle in behalf of a classless society. "Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinctive feature: it has simplified the class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat."¹

Where place the remaining elements of society, — the military, government officials, ministers, professionals, journalists, artists, and high-grade clerks, — the "ideological classes," as Marx calls them?² About these he says very little, but from the few scattered hints one may venture to infer his intent in dealing with them. It is clear at once that such people as the military will be grouped with the bourgeoisie, because they are merely the henchmen of the capitalists, and are ready to spring upon the proletariat at the nod of the master. As to the others, a new criterion may be suggested: not material interests and personal relations of production, but the intellectual horizon, the attitudes to the social movement, the theoretical interests and sympathies. Some of them, as preachers and economists, are the avowed defenders of the capitalists, their "hired prize fighters"; others have a bourgeois mind, and can see only from the bourgeois angle. All these will manifestly be placed with the bourgeoisie as its appendage. Some do not "intellectually leap the bounds" that the lower middle class dares not leap "in practical life," and are "theoretically driven to the same problems and solutions to which material interests and social standing practically drive the latter."³ Such persons will evidently be catalogued with the transition class. Then ideologists, "who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole," will be classified with the proletariat. The students in Vienna who fought alongside the workers during the uprisings of 1848⁴ will undoubtedly enjoy the honor of being listed with the proletarian class.

¹ *Communist Manifesto*, p. 13.

² *Capital*, vol. i, 487.

³ Marx, *18th Brumaire*, p. 53; *Communist Manifesto*, p. 46.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 26; *Revolution and Counter Revolution*, pp. 66, 166.

What are the primary causes of the existence of classes? Why do human beings place themselves in contending groups instead of preferring to work out their destiny in harmony and coöperation?

The chief motive force of the formation of classes is a human trait, deeply embedded in man's nature, reliable in its assertiveness, and persevering in its working — self-interest. The postulate is that groups behave primarily in accordance with the promptings and guidance that emanate from material considerations. Self-interest is the dominant inspiring motive of classes throughout history, the animating power that molds them and drives them to action. As the individual is the apotheosis of self-interest, so is the class. Speaking of the three classes, the feudal landowners, the bourgeoisie, and the proletariat, Engels questions how they came into existence. He replies that “. . . in the fight between the landholding class and the bourgeoisie, no less than in that between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, economic interests were the most important.”¹ He charges that the old idealistic philosophy of history was inadequate and misleading, because it “knew nothing of class wars dependent upon material interests, and nothing of material interests, specially.”²

The dictates of self-interest are supreme. They surmount any other dispositions, feelings, and notions, and cement divergent elements into one body. They will ultimately forge the powerful lever that will tear all bonds of nationality, dissipate religious prejudices, obliterate color and race distinctions, and bind into one world class the proletarians of all countries. The member of the American railway brotherhood will unite in common cause with the Finnish lumberjack and the Italian worker laboring in the Sicilian mines; the Yankee mechanic will join the French longshoreman, and the two will combine with the Polish agricultural laborer of the Prussian noble; the Scotch miner or the South Carolina cotton weaver will extend hands to the negro janitor or the factory hand in Japan. “Workers of the world, unite!”

¹ Feuerbach, p. 110.

² *Anti-Dühring*, p. 48. See also his “Socialisme de juristes,” in *Le mouvement socialiste*, vol. xii, 100, 102.

But self-interest cannot operate in a vacuum. Conditions that furnish suitable ground for its expression, that antagonize it and prod it into action, must be bred within society. Such conditions are furnished by the personal relations of production that are interwoven with a given system of producing goods. When one group of agents owns the means of production and exercises direct or remote authority over the freedom of another group which is in need of these means in order to live, the self-interest of the first group is furthered, but that of the second is frustrated. The one will try to extort as much as possible, and the other will resist. It will be to the interest of the one to uphold the régime; it will be to the interest of the other to demolish it. The result is two antagonistic classes facing each other.

Both causes must be present to give rise to class struggles. If human beings were not actuated by motives of self-interest, the material relations of production, themselves, or the antithesis between new and old productive systems would not lead human beings to the type of reactions which culminate in hostile classes. With the absence of self-interest different modes of behavior would follow upon such conditions. Likewise, if the material conditions were not of such a nature as to provoke the urgings of self-interest, the reason for classes would be absent.

The theory of class stratification is an indispensable part of Marx's interpretation of history. It throws light on the morphology of society. The aggregate social relations of the producers and the resulting classes determine the character of a given society and constitute its economic framework or structure.¹ Without an idea of classes society would present itself, from the Marxian viewpoint, as a conglomeration of people with diverse relations among themselves and toward nature, engaged in producing the necessities of life, and subjected to a complex of forces that the system of production originates. It would be difficult to orientate oneself in it, to discern the forces that govern it and the precise ends toward which they are tending. But the classes, resting on the relations of production and representing the alignment of interests, exhibit the internal organization of society and

¹ *Wage-Labor and Capital*, p. 29; *Capital*, vol. iii, 725, 952.

the foundation on which it is based. The classes point to the type of structure that society presents and to the elements that play within. "Population," observes Marx, "is an abstraction if we leave out, for example, the classes of which it consists."¹ And he informs us that "It is always the direct relation of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers, which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden foundation of the entire social construction."²

This social structure, rooted as it is in the most vital elements, as the mode of production, the productive forces, and the corresponding social relations and interests, is therefore the suitable groundwork on which is erected the superstructure of institutions and ideas. As will be shown later in some detail, classes and class interests explain why particular institutions arise in history, and why given ideas are entertained by the members of a society; in other words, they explain social life in its static aspects. For this reason Marx considers the mode of production and the structure of society of equal efficacy in generating the remaining, derived phases that characterize an epoch. In the formulation of his interpretation of history given in the preface to the *Critique of Political Economy* (page 11), he says:

The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society — the real foundation on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life.

In some of the other references to their theory Marx and Engels mention either the mode of production as the cause of the other historical phenomena,³ or the relations of production.⁴

However, the more accurate and the more comprehensive view would be that they consider both as the foundation. That is, the real basis upon which the idealogical superstructure is reared

¹ *Critique of Political Economy*, appendix, p. 292.

² *Capital*, vol. iii, 919.

³ Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. 45; preface to the *Origin of the Family*, pp. 9-10.

⁴ Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 119; Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. xxxvii.

consists of two tiers, one superimposed upon the other: the given system of production and the economic relations, or classes, it calls into being. The former, or the lower tier, is the supporter and regulator of the upper; but the two are amalgamated into a substructure upon which the rest is built. Therefore, in most of the direct and more formal statements of the theory the two authors emphasize both the organization of production and the social relations, or classes, as the fountain head out of which the rest flows.¹ They mean to affirm that living beings make their history, and that the mode of production, while supplying the motive power and the vitality, cannot of itself enact historic events. Human agents are needed, and these the classes supply.

Classes have another momentous mission in history. They are vitally linked up with the evolutionary process of society. The march of civilization proceeds dialectically, through the antitheses with which a given mode of production is laden, and through the synthesis that results from the amalgamation of the thesis and its negation. But impersonal elements cannot accomplish this dialectic movement. Productive forces cannot of themselves combat and annihilate an old organization of production, and effect a new synthesis of a higher order. Such work can be done only by human beings. There must be living agents who perceive the antagonism between the material elements, and who see that their interests are involved in the antagonism. There must be some who will support the old thesis, and others who will ally themselves with the new antithetic forces, thus paving the road for a gradual or swift, peaceful or acrimonious, inauguration of a new synthesis, a new basis on which society can be grounded. The classes of society perform this function, and consequently the progress of history is identified with class struggles. "The history of all past society has consisted in the development of class antagonisms."²

The process is as follows. The relations existing among the participants in the production of commodities in a given epoch

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 94 n.; *Anti-Dühring*, p. 48; *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, pp. 41, xviii-xix; preface to *Communist Manifesto*, pp. 7-8.

² *Communist Manifesto*, p. 40.

are to the advantage of the dominant class. This class is therefore interested in the continuation of the régime. But the propertyless and exploited class is dissatisfied, and is searching for a means of solving its difficulties. Such is the case in the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, as Marx views it. The solution, however, cannot be spun out of the mind or created by pious wishes. It can begin to shape itself and to come to the consciousness of men only when the developing material conditions arrive, to offer suggestions and to point the way. This occurs when, within the old system of production, the expanding productive forces reach such a stage that they can no longer thrive within the old régime with its social relations; when they begin to threaten the extirpation of the old order and to disclose the possible nature of the new one. It is then that the abused class gains light both as to its predicaments and as to the tactics to pursue. It perceives that its interests and fate are bound up with the dialectic movement. It realizes that the antagonistic productive forces are fighting for its emancipation; that it suffers when they are impeded in their growth, and that it will triumph when they overpower the old order. It becomes therefore the ardent champion of the dialectic. Its course of action is henceforth clear. It allies itself with these productive forces, and strives untiringly for the removal of any obstacles to their speedy development.¹ Harkening to the dictates of the material elements at play and acting in unison with them, it seeks to usher in the new régime which they fashion silently and steadily, and in which the altered relations of production will abolish all exploitation. Marx proclaims:

An oppressed class is the vital condition of every society based upon the antagonism of classes. The emancipation of the oppressed class therefore necessarily implies the creation of a new society. In order for the oppressed class to be emancipated it is necessary that the productive powers already acquired and the existing social relations should no longer be able to exist side by side.²

Or else, when the productive forces expand and introduce the makings and beginnings of a better society, a different class, not

¹ "Up to the present the productive forces have been developed thanks to this régime of the antagonism of classes," asserts Marx in *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 66.

² *Ibid.*, p. 189.

the one exploited under the old productive relations, may appear. It represents the nascent régime, and comprehends that only under the fullest development of the latter can it gain full sway. But at such a period there is the inevitable maladjustment between the two systems. The old order, with its narrow restrictions and antiquated institutions, stunts the growth of the rising order and thwarts at each step the interests and activities of the new class. This class is undismayed, however. It is waiting for the progressive development of the new productive forces, for the time when "the material conditions necessary to its emancipation" will reach maturity. When the time arrives, it begins the series of struggles terminating in the triumph of the new régime. Such was the nature of the conflicts between feudalism and capitalism.¹

Whatever the details, social evolution is based on the continual dialectic process within the modes of production, and its actual carrying-out is entrusted to the struggle of classes who perceive the antithesis, who see their interests involved, and who wage the contests which lead to the transformation of one economic era into another. Social dynamics and Marxian classes are inextricably interwoven, and the pages of history are the pages of class struggles. "Revolutions are the locomotives of history," asserts Marx.² And he teaches: "From the very moment in which civilization begins production begins to be based on the antagonism of orders, of states, of classes, and finally on the antagonism between accumulated labor [that is, capital] and present labor. No antagonism, no progress. That is the law which civilization has followed down to our day."³ "It is this rapid and passionate development of class antagonism which, in old and complicated social organisms, makes a revolution such a powerful agent of social and political progress."⁴

The idea of classes and class struggles is, then, an integral part of Marx's interpretation of history, and it cannot be severed

¹ Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*, pp. 132-133.

² *Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich*, p. 90.

³ *Poverty of Philosophy*, pp. 65-66.

⁴ *Revolution and Counter Revolution*, p. 64.

from the theory without seriously injuring it. The mode of production and the productive forces embody the basic, but impersonal and objective, elements of history. The classes furnish the living agents that carry out the orders of these material forces; they constitute the structure of society, they contribute to the formation of the substructure on which the "ideologies" are based, and they are indispensable in the statics as well as in the dynamics of history. It is, therefore, amazing that some writers on Marx's conception of history entirely omit the discussion of classes. This is like *Hamlet* with Hamlet left out.

PART III

**THE IDEOLOGICAL ELEMENT
IN HISTORY**

CHAPTER VII

THE DERIVATION OF IDEAS

THE mode of production and the corresponding relations of production among its living agents form, in Marx's view, the infrastructure upon which man erects his institutions, and from which he derives his ideas. State and law, morality and religion, art and science, all flow from this source and are all determined by it. Human ideology rests upon the material economic facts as its foundation. The question is how this foundation is metamorphosed into institutions and ideas, how man obtains his knowledge and builds his intellectual and spiritual world; how, in brief, existence leads to consciousness. This problem is intricately connected with some of the fundamental principles of the Marxian philosophy.

To state the answer briefly, men derive their ideas through experience in its widest sense, and through the digestion of the experience by a process going on in the crucible of their individual, and particularly of their class, interests. Personal idiosyncrasies and impressions, mental attitudes and powers, and environmental elements of all descriptions, are the ingredients at work. The question is, What is reality, and what is meant by experience? How is this process of digestion carried on, and what is the nature of the result?

With Hegel, their master, reality is embodied only in the Idea, existing from eternity, lording over everything, self-developing and ever growing by a process of its own. In its various stages the Idea incorporates itself with nature, expresses itself in cosmic phenomena, and inundates the human mind with images and ideas. It is the Absolute in its majestic and inscrutable operation. The thing we perceive is, in essence, the idea we have of it in our mind. The objects are but reflexes, copies, results of this *a priori* thought, the thought before the fact. The ideas we form are the creatures bearing witness to the powerful action of the Idea in the

universe, they are emanations of this all-impregnating source. Reality proceeds from the idea.¹

Not so with Marx and Engels. To them reality is the sum total of objects and facts in nature and society. These objects and facts enjoy an existence independent and outside of our mind. They are there whether we are present to perceive them or not. In nature they constitute the realm of things and phenomena that we reach with our senses, the realm of organic and inorganic bodies, animate or inanimate. They have substance, and are capable of measurement in terms of given units. Then there are the basic social phenomena, designated ordinarily by such expressions as "economic conditions," "economic structure of society," "material conditions of existence," and "class relations." They comprise tangible as well as psychic facts; they include productive forces, the mode of production, class interests, and classes.² This reality in nature and society serves as the primal source of the generation of ideas. Reality is the antecedent, ideas are the consequent. "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness," says Marx.³ And Engels quotes from *Faust*: *Im Anfang war die Tat*.⁴

The phenomena of this world of reality, and therefore the resulting ideas, do not present a complex of finished things, suddenly sprung into existence; fixed and immutable; each with a clearly demarked entity and without relations to others; each possessing this or the other quality, a positive or a negative feature; each a cause or an effect. On the contrary, things have been developing since the beginning of time, and they are still in the process of growth. "Nothing is constant whatever be its nature, time, or position, but everything is in motion, suffers change, and passes away."⁵ Everything is in a flux, in an agitation of becoming and

¹ Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 94; *Anti-Dühring*, p. 45. But see B. Croce, *Historical Materialism*, pp. 6-7.

² Marx, *Critique of Political Economy*, p. 12; *18th Brumaire*, pp. 48-49.

³ *Critique of Political Economy*, p. 11.

⁴ Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. xv.

⁵ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 41.

developing. But through all the complexities, through all the apparent accidents, fluctuations, and deviations, there is to be detected a steady march of progressive evolution from the simple to the complex, from a lower to a higher scale. There is a law of progress governing everything in the universe.

Neither do things stand out as isolated entities; they rather merge into one another, and are in an endless net of interlacings, so that demarcations and classes, dichotomies and contrasts, while in evidence, are yet relative and hard to discern. As Engels has it:

We find also, if we look at the matter more closely, that the two poles of an antithesis, positive and negative, are just as inseparable as they are antagonistic, and that, in spite of all their fixed antagonisms, they permeate each other; also that cause and effect are concepts which can only realize themselves in relation to a particular case. However, when we come to examine the separate case in its general relation to the world at large, they come together and dissolve themselves in face of the working out of the universal problem, for, here, cause and effect exchange places, what was at one time and place effect becoming cause and vice-versa.¹

Engels takes pains to demonstrate these affirmations by examples from natural phenomena. Kant had destroyed the conception of a rigid, stable solar system, and introduced the hypothesis that the earth and the planets have originated gradually and by the "historical process" from a rotating mass of nebulae. This theory was afterwards formulated mathematically by Laplace; and still later the spectroscope disclosed the presence in space of glowing masses of gas in different stages of condensation.² For the demonstration of gradual growth in the domain of life, Engels appeals to Darwin.³ And to prove that there are no sharp, impassable frontiers among phenomena, he calls upon the spheres of physics, chemistry, and biology. Gases can be liquefied; a body can be put in a position where liquid and gaseous stages are hardly to be differentiated; water changes at 0 degrees centigrade from a liquid to a solid, and at 100 degrees, from a liquid to a gas. Motion can be transformed into kinetic energy,

¹ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 43, or p. 8 in the German edition. Cf. *Briefwechsel zwischen F. Engels und K. Marx*, vol. iv, 344.

² *Anti-Dühring*, p. 44.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

into electricity, heat, light, magnetism, chemical energy — and therewith “the last notion of an extramundane Creator is destroyed.”¹ Various combinations of atoms of carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen will originate diverse kinds of organic acids with different properties: for example, CH_2O_2 is formic acid with a boiling point at 100 degrees and melting point at 1 degree; $\text{C}_2\text{H}_4\text{O}_2$ is acetic acid with 118 degrees and 17 degrees as the corresponding points; and so on to melissic acid, which melts at 180 degrees, but has no boiling point.²

In the biological world, it is, similarly, hard to maintain sharply defined classes, since intermediate specimens are discovered every now and then; and old classifications are frequently broken down — so minute and imperceptible is the transition. “We have now mammals which lay eggs and, if the news be correct, birds also which go on all fours.” The individuality of the single cell in an organism is, “scientifically and dialectically speaking,” lost in a federation of cells; and the individuality of the animal is now difficult to establish because of the discovery of the amoeba in the blood corpuscles of higher animals.³ Sometimes it is no easy matter to decide whether an animal is alive or not, as jurists know, who attempted to decide just when the killing of a child in the womb of the mother constitutes murder. It is equally impossible to tell the precise moment when death sets in, because “physiology shows that death is not a single and sudden event but a very slow process.”⁴

“But what is true of nature . . . is true also of the history of society in all its branches, and of the totality of all sciences which occupy themselves with things human and divine.”⁵ Social phenomena, too, exhibit a ceaseless flux, endless interrelations, and imperceptible transitions. “There is a continual movement of growth in productive forces, of destruction in the social relations, of formation in ideas; there is nothing immutable but the abstraction of the movement — *mors immortalis*,” teaches Marx.⁶

¹ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 33, 156; Feuerbach, p. 99.

² *Anti-Dühring*, p. 157.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁵ Feuerbach, p. 102.

⁶ Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 119. Cf. *Capital*, vol. i, 16.

It is for this reason that in *Capital* Marx never offers "fixed and universally applicable definitions," explains his friend. Marx, he says, regarded things and their mutual interweavings as incessantly changing; their mental images, and the ideas concerning them become, then, likewise unstable; therefore they could not "be sealed up in rigid definitions."¹

This is their view of reality in nature and society and of the resulting character of thought. They do not explain why reality has such peculiarities, and why it conducts itself in this manner. But they mean to reveal the processes, the mechanism by which the changes and upward developments are consummated in the universe. Here, once more, they borrow from the heritage bequeathed by Hegel. The secret of the process is unveiled if we call to mind the dialectic.

As Marx and Engels see it, the Idea, according to Hegel, has an independent existence, and every phenomenon is only an abstraction of it, an emanation of Reason. This Reason, in whatever sphere, is not stable and unchangeable, but it goes through endless cycles of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. The impersonal Reason in a given state is the thesis, the affirmation, the position. In time it engenders its own contradiction. Everything in the universe — a reflex of reason — is not spared this movement; everything has its antithesis, negation, or opposition. A struggle ensues between the two antagonistic elements. The outcome is a fusion of the two; they amalgamate, neutralize each other, "the yes becoming no, the no becoming yes, the yes becoming at once yes and no, the no becoming at once no and yes."² Out of this travail is born a new affirmation of a higher order than the previous one, an improvement on it, a further growth and development. It is the new synthesis, the negation of negation, or the composition. Then the dialectic movement proceeds further, and a new cycle is liberated issuing in still higher theses. A collection of theses constitutes a group of thoughts. This group lives through the same processes, giving rise to a contradictory group as its antithesis, and leading to a new group of thoughts, which

¹ *Capital*, vol. iii, Engels's preface, p. 24.

² Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 117.

forms the synthesis. Similarly, the dialectic movement of the groups leads to the series, and the cyclical growth of the series finally builds up the whole System, the Hegelian System.¹

The dialectic philosophy Marx and Engels borrowed directly from Hegel. Yet their dialectic is not identical with Hegel's, and this fact they themselves are eager to point out. There are two differences, they urge. In the first place, with Hegel the dialectic movement is achieved by the universal, absolute Idea, while reality is merely the derivative. With them, it is the real phenomena that are observed to move and grow dialectically, and the ideas are no more than resulting reflections of the material world. This is what Marx means when he says that his "dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. . . . With him it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell."² With Hegel the dialectic is fraught with metaphysical subtleties; with them, it is the manner in which reality behaves in nature and society, and which is accessible to observation by anyone who would but look around.

In the second place, Hegel's idea of progressive change was narrow, in Engels's estimation. Hegel recognizes no continual expansion in time, no steady growth from epoch to epoch. The spirit alone is capable of progressive evolution; reality, which is the mere expression (*Entäußerung*) of the Idea, can unfold itself only in space. Historically, that is, from period to period, reality is doomed to the eternal repetition of the same cyclical process. In other words, Hegel allows progression "one beside another" (*Nebeneinander*), but not "one after another" (*Nacheinander*). Not so with Marx and Engels. They believed that the phenomena of the universe are evolving from a lower to a higher stage, from the simple to the complex, and are subject to a process of perpetual improvement and perfection.³

Other differences, not pointed out by the two authors, readily

¹ Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*, pp. 114-118.

² *Capital*, vol. i, 25; Cf. Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 95. But see B. Croce, *Historical Materialism*, p. 6.

³ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 31; *Feuerbach*, p. 67.

come to mind. One important difference is that with Hegel the Idea is impersonal; it floats above human affairs, and enacts of itself the dialectic process. But with them the dialectic in history is an earthly matter, one commingled with human interests; with them the dialectic, as was seen in the previous chapter, is at decisive periods enlisting the aid of human agencies. It is indissolubly connected with class interests and class struggles. Again, with our two authors the historically far-reaching action of the dialectic moves within the framework of the economic eras of production, and its crowning achievement lies in perfecting the transitions from one era to another. The Marxian succession of gens, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, socialism, is a succession of the stages of the ascending dialectic labors. Hegel, on the other hand, does not map out for the dialectic a progressive road marked by such economic milestones.¹

Marx and Engels have the highest regard for the dialectic. It is their key to all mysteries, and for years it had been their "best tool" and "sharpest weapon," as Engels acknowledges.² It is to them vastly more than a tool. It is a manner of conceiving the whole universe, a *Weltanschauung*. It is the supreme law ruling all phenomena, the very essence of *Gesetzmässigkeit*, binding the regularity of all sequences. "It is a very far-reaching, and, just for this reason, a very important law of development of nature, human history and thought, a law which we see realized in the animal and vegetable kingdoms, in geology, in mathematics, in history, and philosophy. . . . The dialectic is, as a matter of fact, nothing but the science of the universal laws of motion, and evolution in nature, human society and thought."³ They esteem it as "the highest form of thought."⁴

As soon as each separate science makes clear its relation to

¹ Cf. E. Troeltsch, "Ueber den Begriff einer historischen Dialektik," *Historische Zeitschrift* (1919), vol. cxx, 412-432.

² Feuerbach, p. 96.

³ *Anti-Dühring*, p. 173. "A correct notion of the universe, of the human race, as well as of the reflection of this progress in the human mind can be had only by means of the dialectic method." *Ibid.*, p. 44. Just what is meant by "law" of phenomena they never made clear. Is it a metaphysical concept, a normative, empirical, or "natural" law?

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

“things in general,” philosophy will vanish as a superfluous study, but logic and the dialectic will endure.¹ Of these two the dialectic is superior as a method of discovering new results and of advancing from the known to the unknown, because it “transcends the narrow limits of formal logic, attains a more comprehensive philosophical position.” What is true of the results obtained by mensa of the dialectic may appear false if tested by logic, for the latter dares not scale the heights the former can reach; even as what is true in higher mathematics may be false from the viewpoint of lower mathematics.² The two friends are therefore grieved to see that only very few appreciate the supreme value of the dialectic. “There is at present much need in the finer world (I mean naturally the ‘intellectual’ portion of it) of mastering the dialectic,” observes Marx; and Engels deplores the fact that the number of those capable of thinking dialectically “may still be easily counted.”³ No wonder the Marxists are mystified and awed by the majesty of the dialectic, and writers or translators in their inevitable and frequently tedious introductions exhort the laborers to learn to think dialectically.

The world of this living, dialectically behaving reality is the starting point of the formation of ideas, concepts, and institutions. No mind can engage in its own creations and imaginings; it always draws its raw material from reality as a source, no matter how remote, vague, or indirect. There is nothing in man’s head but accumulations of reality consciously acquired through devious channels. No ideas can come into existence except those that have some basis in reality. In pure mathematics, for example, it may appear that we are dealing with concepts totally independent of our experiences. But on closer examination we discover our error. The notion of number and form has its genesis in the real world. There were objects to count, to add and subtract; there was a need to compare them and measure them; there were shapes, configurations, and surfaces to observe. Rectangles and

¹ *Anti-Dühring*, p. 47.

² *Ibid.*, p. 165.

³ *Briefwechsel zwischen F. Engels und K. Marx*, vol. iii, 424; Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 44.

cylinders, though of imperfect form, had to be perceived before the cylinder could be regarded as a body formed by the revolution of a rectangle about one of its sides. First reality, then mathematical observation and law.¹ The defeat of mercantilism by the physiocrats and Adam Smith is not a victory of thought, but merely a thought reflex of changed economic facts. Otherwise Richard Lionheart and Philip Augustus, instead of indulging in crusades, might have introduced free trade and spared the world 500 years of hardships.² Nature and society are the source of all ideas, not a God who enables man's mind to create in some mysterious fashion ideas which are totally divorced from the external world.

The subject of inquiry now before us is the manner in which this reality is ultimately converted into institutions and ideas. Marx and Engels emphasize repeatedly that reality mirrors itself in man's brain, and emerges as an idea or image:

To Hegel, the life process of the human brain, that is, the process of thinking, which, under the name of "the Idea," he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of "the Idea." With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.³

We conceived of ideas . . . as pictures of real things. . . . Hereupon . . . the dialectic of Hegel was turned upside down or rather it was placed upon its feet instead of on its head, where it was standing before.⁴

However, they do not intend to intimate that with such statements the great problem of cognition is exhausted. They go much further.

The reaction of human beings to reality that comes to their awareness will determine, on the one hand, the nature of the institutions they will establish, and, on the other hand, the types of

¹ *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 59-60.

² Engels, letter of July 14, 1893, reprinted in F. Mehring, *Geschichte der deutschen Sozialdemokratie*, vol. iii, part 2, p. 557.

³ *Capital*, vol. i, 25.

⁴ Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 96. "The two-fold social character of the labor of the individual appears to him, when reflected in his brain, only under those forms which are impressed upon that labor in everyday practice by the exchange of products." *Capital*, vol. i, 84-85. "The realities of the outer world . . . reflect themselves there as feelings, thoughts. . . ." Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 73.

ideas they will possess. All human institutions rest on an economic basis, and are excrescences, ideological photographs, of economic facts. To account for the origin, nature, and destinies of institutions, we have only to turn to economic facts from which they issued. The given mode of production and the corresponding relations among the producers create a tissue of data and situations which people perceive with their senses. The dominant class (class, and not individuals, since in the drama of history individuals do not count), the one that owns the means of production and enjoys freedom and authority, suffuses these perceptions with class interests and considerations. The promptings of self-interest fill the class with the desire to perpetuate the given productive order and the given productive relations. The existing economic facts clearly indicate what measures to take, what safeguards to construct, and on what plans to proceed. The outcome is an authoritative arrangement that will preserve the power of the class, and will at the same time merely reflect or substantiate reality. The result is, in other words, the state, law, morality, customs.

No human will plays a part in this process, and no universal reason has to intrude its physiognomy. Economic reality, perceived by the mind through a mirroring process within it, mingled with calculations of class interests, proceeds to translate itself into conduct culminating in solidified institutions which all subserve class ambitions. The dominant class is merely translating into action the dictates of reality so perceived and so assimilated. The class acts as an automaton. All that its members need is senses to perceive, self-interest to digest and color the perception, and the faculty to act on such premises. There is no weaving of something out of nothing, there is no caprice or accident. Everything emanates from a material basis, everything is predetermined. When the dialectic disintegrates one mode of production and introduces another one, the process repeats itself. A new economic reality and new classes with new interests will result in different reflections and in different institutions.

In a very similar manner we form our ideas and notions of the realm of phenomena about us and of the issues that confront us.

The objects of reality reach us through various avenues. We become aware of them by observation and direct contact, when we work and move about. There are also agencies that acquaint us with phenomena too remote in time or space to allow of direct perception, and that interpret and shed light on facts already familiar to us. These agencies are education, conversation, reading, and the like.¹ Then begins the process of the assimilation of the data thus reaching our consciousness, the work of forming ideas and judgments, of building the intellectual content of our inner selves and of society. Here Marx and Engels distinguish between the assimilation process of the "ordinary mind," of the vast majority of people, and the type of assimilation going on in the mind of the true scientist. The line is drawn between "illusionism," the result of the former process, and scientific truths, the result of the latter process.

The ordinary individual, or the "ordinary mind," has an attitude of mental indifference toward the external world presenting itself to his senses. He is not mentally alert, and is reluctant to examine and analyze phenomena surrounding him. With him observation is not an intense, wakeful procedure but a superficial performance. He allows the mere appearances of things to pass undisturbed into his mental receptacle. Similarly, the processes of education, reading, and the like, become merely acts of transmitting knowledge to a mind receptive and absorbing, not active and doubting. Man imbibes readily the notions handed to him. His realm of ideas consists, then, of what he obtains through his own observation and, in a larger degree, of a mass of tradition accumulated in the past and unquestioningly accepted by him.

But here, too, the acquired perceptions have to go through the fire in the caldron of class prejudices and class interests. Man is the creature of his class, and he is imbued with class feelings and habits that determine his mental attitudes toward facts presented to him. These facts he does not meet in a spirit of detachment; he allows them to be distorted by the class attitudes that enwrap him. To quote from Marx:

¹ Marx, *Revolution and Counter Revolution*, pp. 23-24, 29-32, 41, 60.

Upon the several forms of property, upon the social conditions of existence, a whole superstructure is reared of various and peculiarly shaped feelings, illusions, habits of thought, and conceptions of life. The whole class produces and shapes these out of its material foundation and out of the corresponding social conditions. The individual unit to whom they flow through tradition and education may fancy that they constitute the true reasons for and premises of his conduct.¹

In a word, reality impinges on man's consciousness by means of the senses; goes through the prism of class tradition and prejudice; is deflected and colored in the process; and emerges as a complex of erroneous notions, as "reflections" of mere appearances. This is the intellectual world of the ordinary man. Appearances are never penetrated so that their true nature is reached. In addition, they are vitiated by class interests. It is therefore a world of illusions.

Many are the victims of "illusionism." The actors in the domain of production hardly know the essence of the circumstances in which they are involved. "The conceptions formed about the laws of production in the heads of the agents of production and circulation will differ widely from these real laws and will be merely the conscious expression of the apparent movements."² The worker, "by education, tradition, habit," looks upon the conditions of capitalistic production as laws of nature; he does not grasp the fact that they contain within themselves the seeds of their own destruction, which he could hasten if his eyes were only open.³ The money relation conceals the existence of surplus-value and gives rise to misconceptions.

This phenomenal form, which makes the actual relation invisible, and, indeed, shows the direct opposite of that relation, forms the basis of all juridical notions of both laborer and capitalist, of all the mystifications of the capitalist mode of production, of all its illusions as to liberty, of all the apologetic shifts of vulgar economists.⁴

The "ordinary mind" is not the only victim. Engels complains that the bulk of scientists and mathematicians adhere to "an antiquated mode of thought," and create confusions which drive teacher and pupil to despair.⁵ But in the saddest plight of all is

¹ Marx, *18th Brumaire*, p. 48. ² *Capital*, vol. iii, 369. ³ *Ibid.*, vol. i, 809.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 591-592. Cf. *18th Brumaire*, pp. 47-49.

⁵ *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 44, 153.

political economy. Marx declares that after 1830 economics as a science became an impossibility in England and France! "Political economy can remain a science only so long as the class struggle is latent or manifests itself only in isolated and sporadic phenomena." Such was the situation in England till 1830, while modern industry was barely emerging, and the class struggle was in the background. Then economics flourished, and Ricardo was its "last great representative." "With the year 1830 came the decisive crisis": in France and England the bourgeoisie attained political power, and thenceforth the class struggle assumed threatening forms. "It sounded the knell of scientific bourgeois economy." Political economy became no longer a disinterested search for truth. Instead of remaining investigators, the economists enlisted as the "hired prize fighters," the "sophists and sycophants," of the ruling class. After 1848, interspersed among them were also adherents of "shallow syncretism," harmonizers and reconcilers of the irreconcilable, of whom J. S. Mill was the "best representative." The question was no longer whether a proposition was true or not, but whether it was "useful to capital or harmful, expedient or inexpedient, politically dangerous or not." The same fate befell the science in Germany, after 1848, and for similar reasons. This is Marx's judgment in his preface to *Capital*.¹

The science became infested with those whom he calls "vulgar economists," and against whom he never tires of thundering his philippics. In doctrinaire fashion and with detestable servility they treat of the capitalist system as natural and reasonable, immutable and eternal. They systematize and codify, didactically and dogmatically, the phenomena of economic life, for the delectation of "the ordinary brain," and supply a "religion of everyday life" to the self-complacent bourgeoisie. They do not attempt to distinguish between the appearance of a thing and its essence; as a consequence their notions are distorted by the treacherous, superficial forms the phenomena outwardly display.² To cite only a few examples, they do not see that advances made to

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, Introduction, pp. 17-20.

² *Ibid.*, vol. i, 93 n., vol. iii, 913, 951, 967.

labor are but part of the surplus-value of which the worker is robbed;¹ they do not discern that the members of the "trinitarian formula," Capital, Land, Labor, have the same relation to each other as "lawyer's fees, carrots, and music";² they do not understand that the expression "Price of Labor" is just as irrational as "a yellow logarithm";³ they do not refrain from having "Mr. Capital and Mrs. Land carry on their goblin tricks" in "an enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world."⁴ Among the vulgar economists he numbers McCulloch, Senior, J. B. Say.⁵

The best spokesmen of classical political economy move on a higher plane. Nevertheless, even they "remained more or less the prisoners of the world of illusion which they had dissolved critically. . . . Consequently all of them fall more or less into inconsistencies, half-way statements, and unsolved contradictions."⁶ Adam Smith and Ricardo failed to see the many sides of exchange-value. Simple as the law of the falling rate of profits is, all economists, beginning with Adam Smith, "cudged their brains in tortuous attempts" to fathom its mystery; but in vain. There is no wonder, however, that they failed to solve the "riddle," when we consider that political economy "up to the present" had been merely "tinkering" with the distinction between constant and variable capital, that it never saw the true nature of profit and surplus-value, that it never thoroughly analyzed the "organic composition of capital."⁷ At times, "Classical political economy nearly touches the true relation of things, without, however, consciously formulating it. This it cannot so long as it sticks in its bourgeois skin."⁸ Apparently, genuinely scientific economics is to be found in Marx only. As proof, he would point to his *Capital*. But not infrequently he specifically reminds us of his deeper insight.⁹

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 623.

² *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 947.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 952. Yet Marx himself frequently uses this expression: see, for example, *Ibid.*, vol. i, 678, 697.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 966.

⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. i, 572 n., 654-655.

⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 967.

⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. i, 92-93 n., vol. iii, 249-250.

⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. i, 594.

⁹ To give but a few references: "I was the first to point out and to examine critically this two-fold nature of labor contained in commodities." *Capital*, vol. i, 48. "Here, however, a task is set us, the performance of which has never yet even been

It follows as a matter of course that both Marx and Engels have little regard for the opinions of the bulk of mankind. Marx admonishes the searcher for the true causes of social transformations to pay no heed to the ideas and feelings of men, but to center his attention on the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science. "Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so can we not judge of such a period of transformation by its own consciousness."¹ Complaining of the varieties of parlor socialism that invaded England toward the end of the nineteenth century, Engels comments: "That shows the incurable fickleness of that terrible despot of 'society,' middle-class public opinion, and once more justifies the contempt in which we socialists of a past generation always held that public opinion."² Marx concludes his first preface to *Capital* with the remark that scientific criticism he welcomes, but that he reckes little for the prejudices "of so-called public opinion," to which he never made any concessions; and he gives "now as aforetime" for his maxim Dante's *Segui il tuo corso, e lascia dir le genti*.³

In contradistinction to the puerile illusions of the ordinary majority and of the mediocre writers, Marx places the well-founded knowledge of the rare few, the genuine scientists. The acquisition of true ideas proceeds in a more earnest and laborious manner. If appearances were identical with reality, if things were what they seem, science would be superfluous.⁴ But appearances are deceptive. They merely present to view the superficial

attempted by bourgeois economy, the task of tracing the genesis of this money form. . . . By doing this we shall, at the same time, solve the riddle presented by money." *Ibid.*, p. 55. Cf. pp. 57 n., 228 n. "I must here remind the reader that the categories, 'variable and constant capital' were first used by me. Political economy since the time of Adam Smith has confusedly mixed up" the distinctions involved here. *Ibid.*, p. 670 n. "The fundamental law of capitalist competition, which political economy has not understood up to the present time," rests on the difference between "the value and the cost-price of commodities." *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 50. "The actual state of things is here revealed for the first time. . . ." *Ibid.*, p. 199. See also pp. 233, 262, 1022-1023.

¹ *Critique of Political Economy*, p. 12.

² Preface of 1892 to his *Conditions of The Working Class in England in 1844*. p. xviii.

Capital, vol. i, 16.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 951.

“phenomenal form,” while the intrinsic nature, the inner mechanism, is hidden or disguised.¹ A commodity may present itself to us as something easy to understand; but deep analysis reveals that it abounds “in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties,” that it possesses “a mystical character,” and is endowed with “magic and necromancy.”² The same is true of other economic phenomena: “*Everything appears upside down in competition.* The existing conformation of economic conditions, as seen in reality on the surface of things . . . is not only different from the internal and disguised essence of these conditions . . . but actually opposed to them, or their reverse.”³ We cannot rely on our senses to convey to us the “hidden substratum” of facts. It is therefore imperative to resolve “the visible and external movement into the internal actual movement.” The task is to defy appearances and to detect the real nature of things. This is the task of science.⁴

Here, too, the source of all knowledge is observation of reality. But the mind is not in the attitude of passive, uncritical absorption of what the senses chance to transmit to it from the outside world. Observation is an active process; it is experimentation, manipulation, and critical testing. This is what Marx calls “praxis” in his notes on Feuerbach: “The chief lack,” he observes, “of the materialistic philosophy . . . is that . . . sensation is conceived of only under the form of the object which is presented to the eye, but not as human sense-activity, ‘praxis,’ not subjectively.”⁵ Upon this idea he bases his education of the future. Education will not be then a process of pressing ideas upon pupils constrained to imbibe them. It will rather go hand in hand with the actual manipulation of objects by the pupils. Instruction, productive labor, and gymnastics will constitute the chief elements of education, and not for the sake of productive

¹ “Scientific truth is always paradox if judged by everyday experience, which catches only the delusive appearance of things.” Marx, *Value, Price and Profits*, p. 70.

² *Capital*, vol. i, 81, 82, 87.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 244–245, 263. Marx’s italics.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 369; vol. i, 594.

⁵ Reprinted in Engels’s *Feuerbach*, appendix i, p. 129.

efficiency, but for the purpose of preparing "fully developed human beings."¹ This idea reminds us of the educational philosophy of Comenius and Pestalozzi.

We rely, then, for true knowledge upon the accurate observation of facts, upon the wise use of our senses. But what guaranty do we possess that the senses are reliable, that they are capable of penetrating into the real nature of things, and that they are adequate to provide us with exhaustive, infallible information? May we not suspect that the object possesses properties and aspects entirely inaccessible to our senses? What of Kant's *Ding an Sich*?

These questions do not baffle Marx and Engels. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, they assert. The object can be put to the test, and all doubts will be destroyed forthwith. We can turn the object to a use warranted by our perception of its nature. If it yields the results expected, if it answers the purpose adequately, we have proof positive that our idea of it is correct. Had our notion of its nature and properties erred, the results we expect from it would fail to come forth. If, as Engels would put it, our senses delude us into considering a shoe-brush as a cow, we shall discover our error when we resort to this object for milk. As long as in our experimentation and handling of objects in various ways we see them behave in concordance with expectations founded on perception, we are certain that our senses are not misleading us, and that the thing in reality and our notion of it as based on sense-perception are congruous. As long as science can reproduce objects out of their constituent elements, and discover unknown planets and stars on the basis of calculations, we are assured that our senses are excellent guides toward grasping reality.

Not in one single instance, so far, have we been led to the conclusion that our sense-perceptions, scientifically controlled, induce in our minds ideas respecting the outer world that are, by their very nature, at variance with reality, or that there is an inherent incompatibility between the outer world and our sense-perceptions of it.

What the senses do not transmit to us need not molest us, for it does not exist. The *Ding an Sich* has no meaning; and its

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 529-530.

resurrection by the neo-Kantians is, "scientifically, a step backward."¹

Discriminating employment of our senses conveys to us the awareness of world phenomena. But we have not as yet a thorough understanding of them. We do not know yet the complexity of concepts, the interrelation of objects, the laws of their change, and their significance in the scheme of the universe. To attain this, another powerful instrument is called into service — thought. Thought is the counterpart of the function of self-interest in the generation of institutions and of the "illusions" of the majority. In these instances the reflections formed by the perception of reality are suffused with class interests or with material considerations of the individual; whereas, in the acquisition of scientific knowledge, the results of painstaking observation are subjected to the cold and vigorous action of thought.

Thought consists in decomposing an object or event into its constituent elements, and in uniting them into a harmonious whole. It operates through analysis and synthesis. First of all, we isolate individual objects out of their general natural or social *milieu*, and examine them separately. We cannot understand a composite picture unless we do this.² Suppose we isolate a concrete economic phenomenon. As it presents itself to our senses, it is an aggregate of elements and a product of a course of evolution through time. It is a complex, a resultant of processes, a synthesis. Yet for sense-perception, precisely this completed object is the starting-point. Our senses attack ready-made objects, and cannot reveal the meaning of the phenomenon or the manner of its final arrival at its present state.³ Accordingly, thought must come to our aid. The concrete entity is broken up into its elements and its various aspects, and each part is studied in detail. It is a study of minutiae apparently unimportant, but they are as significant as the minutiae in microscopic anatomy. Only in natural science the minutiae are arrived at by experimentation; in social sciences, by the power of abstraction.⁴ Then the

¹ Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, pp. xv-xviii; *Feuerbach*, pp. 60-62.

² Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 41.

³ Marx, *Capital*, vol. i, 87; *Critique of Political Economy*, p. 293.

⁴ *Capital*, vol. i, 12, 24-25.

investigation concerns itself with the analysis of the interconnections and the mutual dependence of these elements. This procedure unveils the internal mechanism, the atomic structure of the entity; and thus the aggregate grows in our mind, and finally stands out as a clear concrete economic phenomenon, no longer a puzzle, no longer impregnated with "fetishism." Thought has penetrated its inner make-up and has thrown light on it. The senses disclosed the physiognomy, and thought revealed its meaning.

Only in this sense can we say that reality is a product of thought. Reality is not, as Hegel teaches, merely the Idea residing in our mind; it is palpable and objective, and it exists outside of our consciousness. Only it is comprehended and evaluated through the agency of thought. Marx's observation is as follows:

The method of advancing from the abstract to the concrete is but a way of thinking by which the concrete is grasped and is reproduced in our mind as a concrete. It is by no means, however, the process which itself generates the concrete. . . . The whole . . . is the product of a thinking mind which grasps the world in the only way open to it, a way which differs from the one employed by the artistic, religious, or practical mind.¹

Thought analyzes the elements of the concrete phenomenon and synthesizes them into unity; and this unity is not the creation of juggling phrases, but a fact of reality.² Directly we understand this isolated phenomenon, we can proceed to study its inherent relationships to other situations, until we gain the general picture in its growth and organic composition.

Such is the scientific method. Derive "the scheme of the universe not from our own brain, but merely, by means of our own brain, from the material world," and you need no philosophy; what you will reap is positive science.³ It is a difficult procedure requiring mental effort, painstaking analysis of details, and a laborious scrutiny of the invisible nature of things. Science is not a catalogue of ready formulas, it requires arduous study. "The art of operating with ideas is not inborn, moreover, and is not

¹ Marx, *Critique of Political Economy*, appendix, pp. 293-294.

² Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 64.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

vouchsafed every day to the ordinary mind, but requires actual thought.”¹ There can be no absolute, lighthearted reliance on common sense, for “sound common sense, respectable fellow though he may be in his own home surrounded by his four walls, meets with strange adventures when he betakes himself into the wide world of investigation.”² The true scientist is loth to accept the tutelage of appearances. Above all, he is armed with the dialectic method and attitude. In his investigations he is always on the alert for evidence of evolution and interrelations. He is constantly heedful of the forces that develop within the old as its negation, and that augur its destruction and its supersession by a new synthesis.³ “A correct notion of the universe, of the human race, as well as of the reflection of this progress in the human mind can be had only by means of the dialectic method, together with steady observation of the change and interchange which goes on in the universe.”⁴

The knowledge acquired by individuals at given times is merely an infinitesimal part of the sum total of human knowledge. Human thought is not the thought of mankind in a given year or of a particular school at various periods. It is an accumulation of the ages, a massing together of the “thoughts of many millions of men, past, present, and to come.”⁵ It is coeval with existence and coextensive with the living and thinking universe. Each generation possesses a store of ideas rooted in the circumstances of the time. As conditions alter, as our inherited wealth of knowledge accumulates, we gain deeper insight into reality and perfect our instruments of research. We continually win, therefore, new ideas, which correct or destroy, delimit or enlarge, those transmitted to us from generations in the past. A given generation sees the light in its manner, and has its fundamental ways of approaching things. It makes blunders; and the coming generations correct them and make new blunders. Our present knowledge cannot be regarded as perfect, “because, to all appearances, we

¹ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 34.

² *Ibid.*, p. 42.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

are just standing at the threshold of human history and the generations which will correct us will be much more numerous than those whose knowledge . . . we ourselves correct.”¹

Marx and Engels are therefore staunch upholders of the doctrine of relativity of human thought and institutions. First of all, ideas are relative to the realm of facts which constitute the ultimate basis of perception. This realm is not immutable; it is in an unceasing flux, and subject to fundamental changes. If certain forms of social consciousness have endured, in their general outlines, through many ages, despite the fact that material conditions have altered, it is only because certain elements of economic reality have persistently retained their original character. For instance, through all the economic epochs since the dawn of civilization society has been split into classes of exploiters and exploited. But as soon as the era comes when class antagonisms shall be extinct, these age-old forms of thought will vanish.²

Further, ideas in a given domain are relative to the intellectual heritage bequeathed to us from the past, as well as to conquests in any other sphere of knowledge. All branches of learning are interwoven, and a radical shift of foundations in one branch forces a revision of the underlying working hypotheses of the others. The materialistic philosophy of the eighteenth century was mechanistic, because the natural sciences were then rigid and mechanistic. “The exclusive application of the measure of mechanics to processes which are of chemical and organic nature . . . is the cause of the peculiar, but, considering the times, unavoidable narrowmindedness of the French materialism.” A similar reason is given why this materialism did not regard the universe as a process of evolution.³ When Darwin established the fact of evolution of plant and animal life, all the other sciences became imbued with a new vitality, and they altered their method of approach. Finally, ideas are relative to the physical and mental constitution,

¹ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 119. Cf. *Feuerbach*, p. 41.

² *Communist Manifesto*, p. 40.

³ Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 66.

to the temper and feelings, of the individuals who advance and clarify our knowledge.¹

We cannot boast, then, that our present ideas are eternal truths, inflexible and infallible. Human thought is sovereign only in the sense that it has tremendous possibilities, enormous powers, and a great mission.² A mutable world of reality, new discoveries and further conquests by the human mind may lead to the abandonment of some of our most cherished principles, to the alignment of new guiding hypotheses, and to altogether different ways of contemplating things. To assert that ours is perfect, finite knowledge, valid for all ages, is to maintain that the world of facts will cease to change, and to presume that the countless generations after us will recoil from investigation, thought, and learning. It is to doom the universe to a paralysis, and the world of thought to a frozen stand-still. This is absurd. We ought to be humble about our achievements and say: this we see in the light of present-day facts and thought; the future may gain new and better light; the new will find errors in the old, and will make corrections and erasures. Our knowledge is an endless stream flowing alongside, and parallel to, human existence. It is relative.³

The representatives of the German historical school of economics also endorse the doctrine of relativity; but the relativity of Marx and Engels differs in some important respects. Our two authors hold that social life is subject to definite laws which reveal the operation of cause and effect in the sequence of events. For example, Marx's aim in his *Capital* is to disclose the "natural laws of capitalist production" and to "lay bare the economic law of motion of modern society."⁴ The section in the third volume of *Capital* (pages 247 ff.), where he discusses the tendency of profits to diminish bears the title "The law of the falling tendency of the rate of profit"; likewise with the chapter on the "General law of capitalist accumulation."⁵ But the historical school doubts whether social phenomena can be isolated out of their hopelessly tangled and chaotic *milieu* and made to display definite sequences

¹ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 45, 58, 131.

² *Ibid.*, p. 120.

³ Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 97.

⁴ *Capital*, vol. i, 13, 14.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 671.

where cause and effect can be traced. Even among those who would like to obtain laws from historical inductive studies, some despair of success.

Marx and Engels anchor the relativity of ideas, ultimately and primarily, to the narrow solid basis of material factors. Thus social ideas and institutions and all history move in consonance with economic reality. The historical school is not so clear here. It regards all ideas in almost all spheres as interlaced among themselves, as interacting and as determining each other. There is no single force from which control and change emanate. To understand one domain in science, it is essential to read the history and philosophy of everything else; and to understand economics, one has to be omniscient. Then to the two friends the mainspring of relativity, the cause that calls relativity of human thought into existence, is clear, and it follows logically from their general philosophy. Their philosophy of cognition yokes ideas to reality; therefore the causes of changes in reality will simultaneously present themselves as the causes of relativity. Such causes are the dialectic and class struggles. Their relativity is a concomitant of their theory of cognition and of their view of the dynamic forces operating in history. With the historical school the causes of relativity are not apparent.

Finally, with Marx and Engels the scope of relativity is defined. Each epoch has its mode of production, its classes, and class interests. Consequently, human ideas and institutions vary with each epoch, but within a given epoch they maintain a more or less definite character. The social laws they speak of are the laws manifesting themselves in a certain economic era and in no other era. "Every historical period has laws of its own. . . . As soon as society has outlived a given period of development, and is passing over from one given stage to another, it begins to be subject also to other laws." Such is the summary by a Russian critic of Marx's views of laws, and Marx reproduces it with approval in his preface to the first volume of *Capital*.¹ Discussing the formation of a redundant population in modern society, Marx adds: "in fact, every special historic mode of production has its own special laws

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 23-24.

of population, historically valid within its own limits.”¹ It follows that, viewed from the broad historical angle, social thought and institutions are relative to the five economic epochs, and valid within the confines of each particular one: primitive communism, ancient slavery, medieval feudalism, modern capitalism, and future socialism. The historical school indeed divides history into eras, — Roscher, Hildebrand, Schmoller, Bücher, have their series of “stages” in history, — but this school does not insist that thought and institutions are relative solely with reference to these particular stages, and that they fall into sharply defined categories parallel to these stages.² With the historical school relativity is, in the main, a constantly flowing stream, harnessed to no disparate epochs.

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 693.

² Knies, who was skeptical about economic “stages” and other historical “laws,” holds, likewise, that thought and institutions are relative to time and place in general.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ORIGIN AND NATURE OF INSTITUTIONS

ARMED with such a philosophy of cognition, scornful of illusionism and the cult of appearances, determined to pursue the truly scientific method and to sound the depths of phenomena, Marx and Engels address themselves to the analysis of social institutions and human thought — the state and law, morality and religion, science and philosophy.

The followers of the idealistic philosophy view the state as the realization of the Idea that regulates the affairs of men, and as the concrete manifestation of the requirements of the universal Reason.¹ To others, the state is, more concretely, a mechanism learned and perfected by the human race through long ages of groping and experience; a device to ensure order and peace, safety and welfare, to all the inhabitants of a given territory. To Aristotle the state is the highest form of community, and its aim is the highest good; to Hobbes it is a *sine qua non* of order and safety. The ordinary individual would agree with both, without, however, entering into the specific philosophy of either.

The state is nothing of the kind, declare Marx and Engels. All this is mere fantasy and judgment based on treacherous appearances.² From our childhood on we are brought up to regard the state with veneration and to think that it is the only conceivable agency fit to administer to the common interests of society.³ But this is mere illusionism. In substance, the state is an institution deeply rooted in the economic subsoil and indebted to economic elements for its fortunes.⁴ "I was led by my studies to the conclusion," says Marx, "that legal relations as well as the forms of the state could be neither understood by themselves, nor ex-

¹ Engels, preface to Marx's *Civil War in France*, p. 19.

² Idem, *Feuerbach*, pp. 112-113.

³ Idem, preface to Marx's *Civil War in France*, p. 19.

⁴ Idem, *Feuerbach*, pp. 113-114, 116.

plained by the so-called general progress of the human mind, but that they are rooted in the material conditions of life.”¹ First come the economic facts, then the state springs into existence and is molded accordingly. At a certain stage in the evolution of the systems of production the state is entirely unknown; at other stages economic forces inevitably call it into being; in a future period it will just as inevitably be relegated to the “Museum of Antiquities.”² Every form of production creates its own forms of government.³

The state is a product of society split into classes constantly warring with one another. It is a confession that society is hopelessly torn asunder by irreconcilable antagonisms. The state first appears to allay these conflicts, to prevent the classes from annihilating each other in fruitless combat, and to preserve the struggle within reasonable bounds. But it is powerless to abolish the mighty antagonisms thrown to the surface by the volcanic action of economic elements.⁴ Only under exceptional circumstances, when the contending classes are evenly divided in power, the state holds the balance and serves as a mediator. Bonapartism did it in France during the first and the second empires, playing off the proletarians against the bourgeoisie. Bismarck practised it when he played off the same classes, and cheated both “for the benefit of the degenerate Prussian cabbage junkers.”⁵

But typically and in its very essence the state is an instrument in the hands of the master class, and it is employed to maintain the abused class in subjection. “The state is nothing else than a machine for the oppression of one class by another class, and that no less so in the democratic republic than under the monarchy.”⁶ “The aggregation of civilized society is the state, which throughout all typical periods is the state of the ruling class, and in all

¹ Marx, *Critique of Political Economy*, p. 11.

² Engels, *Origin of the Family*, pp. 211-212.

³ Marx, *Critique of Political Economy*, appendix, p. 273.

⁴ Engels, *Origin of the Family*, p. 206.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 209.

⁶ Engels, preface to Marx's *Civil War in France*, pp. 19-20. The *Communist Manifesto* asserts that “Political power, properly so called, is merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another” (p. 42).

cases mainly a machine for controlling the oppressed and exploited class.”¹ The dominant class needs the state to preserve the sanctity of its property and to protect its possessions from violent hands.

This class is the beneficiary of the prevailing mode of production. It finds it to its interest to perpetuate the régime. This it seeks to effect by the erection of an institution, the state. Not welfare of man, but custody of wealth, is the aim of the state.² Throughout history the population was divided into groups on the basis of property ownership, and each group enjoyed political rights accordingly. “This is a direct confirmation of the fact that the state is organized for the protection of the possessing against the nonpossessing classes.” In the democratic republic wealth is only officially not accepted as a criterion. In fact, it exercises tremendous power; covertly, indeed, “but all the more safely.” There, the opulent class either corrupts the officials by bribery or creates various entangling understandings with the government through banking operations, public debt schemes, corporate control of transportation, and the stock exchange.³

An outstanding, though ordinarily neglected, characteristic of the state is that its members are not bound by ties of kinship as was the case with primitive communities. The state is a territorial unit, and its citizens are grouped, not with reference to blood relationship, but in geographical sections. The state is not organized on the basis of clan or tribe, but on the basis of province, department, district.⁴

Another “essential mark of the state consists in a public power of coercion divorced from the masses of the people.”⁵ The state does not represent a power radiating from the people and coincident with them, but is a force superimposed and hovering above them. This is emphasized repeatedly. “The state presupposes a public power of coercion separated from the aggregate body of

¹ Engels, *Origin of the Family*, p. 214. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 208, and *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, pp. 75-76.

² Engels, *Origin of the Family*, p. 130.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 209-210.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

its members.”¹ It is “the concentrated and organized force of society.”² This force may be insignificant in communities where classes are undeveloped, or in remote, isolated districts, as was once the case in the United States of America. But it is augmented where, and in measure as, the class antagonism is sharpened. The state is an independent authority. It has at its disposal the army, the navy, and the police; the courts, the prisons, and the executioners. It asserts its authority through commands that are to be obeyed without questions. It maintains itself by taxation, national debts, and protective tariffs. Its executive mansions are surrounded by a coterie of the dominant class — a horde of courtiers, functionaries, and potentates; of taxing experts, tariff schemers, and bankers, who know how to keep the masses in subordination and how to drain the life blood of the poor.³

It may appear that all this does not apply to a democratic state, where the people elect the officials and hold them responsive to social interests and needs. But that such is not the case, the United States, Engels urges, clearly demonstrates. In the United States each party is teeming with unscrupulous politicians unceasingly machinating against the common weal. They make a business of politics, speculate on seats in the state and federal legislative houses, agitate and delude the people, and, when victory is gained, divide the spoils.

It is just in the United States that we can most clearly see the process through which the State acquires a position of independent power over against the society. . . . There exists here no dynasty, no aristocracy. . . . Nevertheless, we have here two great rings of political speculators that alternately take possession of the power of the State and exploit it with the most corrupt means and to the most corrupt purposes. And the nation is powerless against these men, who nominally are its servants, but in reality are its two overruling and plundering hordes of politicians.⁴

The state arises for economic reasons, and its destiny is shaped by economic fact. But, as Engels reiterates in some of his last

¹ Engels, *Origin of the Family*, pp. 115-116.

² Marx, *Capital*, vol. i, 823.

³ Engels, *Origin of the Family*, pp. 179, 182, 184, 208; Marx, *Capital*, vol. i, 827, 829; *Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich*, p. 26.

⁴ Engels, preface to Marx's *Civil War in France*, p. 18.

letters, it is not altogether a derivative and a passive resultant. Although an "idea," it reacts on economic phenomena and exerts some influence on them. State action may retard or accelerate the working of economic forces through a policy of protection or free trade, through good or bad financial measures, through wars of aggression or internal strife. However, it can hardly presume to modify the nature of the irresistible economic currents and to turn them from their course. Nor are its motives and methods inspired by any other than economic considerations. When it goes counter to economic facts, it ultimately succumbs. Whenever political power collides with the economic development of a country, "the battle is always ended with the destruction of the political force."

The state is also identified, although passively and indirectly, with the dynamics of society. The ruling class in a given epoch, with a given mode of production, organizes the correlative state power, and through it enacts laws and regulations which fetter the steadily growing productive forces and stifle the nascent class, or the oppressed old class, whose interests are linked with the new era of production that promises to arrive sooner or later. The old productive order, with its old state and regulations, is in "contradiction" with the freshly developing elements. The old state must be broken up before a new synthesis can gain a foothold. This is one of the reasons why Marx and Engels often speak of the class struggle as a political struggle.¹

The state, then, is no realization of the Idea, no manifestation of Reason, no *summum bonum*. When we delve beneath appearances, its true nature is revealed. What is the state? Ask the ruling, propertied class. It will proclaim the arrogant truth: *l'Etat c'est moi*.

This conception of the state is expressed unequivocally and repeatedly in their various writings. It is evidently the fruit of their superior method of investigation and of their vaunted way

¹ Marx, *Die Inauguraladresse der internationalen Arbeiter-Association*, p. 29. Engels, Letters of October 27, 1890, and January 25, 1894, reprinted in A. Labriola's *Socialisme et philosophie*, pp. 250, 251, 259; *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 212-213; *Le mouvement socialiste*, vol. xii, 119.

of forming scientific truths. Yet the attentive reader cannot help feeling that not all is well here, and that the two philosophers are hardly certain of their ground. From the bold pronouncements that the state is a force of repression employed by the class in the saddle, they at times lapse to another view, less militant but more reasoned — namely, that the state is inherently not an instrument functioning to promote the desires and schemes of the predatory class, but that it evolved as an institution designed to take care of the common concerns of society.

Thus in his polemic against Dühring, Engels declares that the state toward which primitive communities had evolved watched over the social interests, such as irrigation in the Orient; and that only with the appearance of classes did it turn into a tool in the hands of the few.¹ This he reiterates in the same work.² In his introduction to Marx's *Civil War in France* he explains that

Society had created for itself definite organs, originally by simple division of labor, for the provision of its common interests. But these organs, at the head of which is the power of the State, had in the course of time . . . transformed themselves from the servants of society into its masters. . . . Against this transformation of the State and the State's organs from the servants of society into its rulers. . . .³

In the discussion of the Gotha program Marx talks of the future commonwealth and asks: "What transformation will the character of the state undergo in becoming a communist society?" A communist body knows no classes and no oppression, yet Marx sees in it a state performing "social functions."⁴ Add to these admissions the one, noted above,⁵ to the effect that the state originated to conciliate class antagonisms, and it becomes clear that Marx and Engels at times embrace the very views they

¹ *Anti-Dühring*, p. 178.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 207, 211.

³ Pp. 17-18. Cf. his *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. 78.

⁴ Reprinted in the *International Socialist Review*, vol. viii, 656. Lenin is particularly anxious to emasculate this statement. He tries to explain that Marx did not mean what he said. It is to Lenin's advantage to establish that with Marx the state is absolutely nothing but a force of oppression employed by the privileged class. Such a view lends support to his contention that only revolution by violence can remove this sinister institution. See Lenin's *Staat und Revolution*, pp. 77-79.

⁵ On p. 140.

ordinarily so hotly denounce as metaphysical and as the illusionism of the "ordinary mind."

However, it is true that most frequently they voice the idea that the state is a summation and a reflection of the desires of the class controlling the system of production. This, and the fact that the state is relative to the economic era, Engels urges that history proves abundantly.¹ In primitive communism the state was unknown. The clan was a homogeneous group with similar interests and desires, and without class distinctions. Every adult, male or female, had a voice in the election of the officials that discharged the communal functions and duties. The council at which all adults met and voted was "the sovereign power in the gens."² The officials were servants sensitively responsive to the common interests, and their power depended solely on the will of the people. There was no force above and apart from the collective will of society, therefore no state. "No soldiers, gendarmes and policemen, no nobility, kings, regents, prefects or judges, no prisons, no lawsuits, and still affairs run smoothly."³ Such was the situation, for example, among the Iroquois Indians in North America.⁴

The same was true in the heroic epoch of ancient Greece. The military chief, the archon, and the treasurer who cared for the common property were elected and deposed by the will of all. But soon private property appeared, differences in wealth arose, the king began to covet the usurper's place, and an aristocracy reared its head and captured offices.⁵ Soon class distinctions arrived and unleashed turmoil and strife. Relief was needed, and Theseus gave a constitution. He established at Athens a central administrative body, the general council; introduced a common law applying even to those outside the Athenian tribe, thus breaking down the ties of kinship; and divided the nation into classes

¹ Engels, *Feuerbach*, pp. 113-114.

² *Idem*, *Origin of the Family*, p. 107.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁴ *Ibid.*, chap. 3. Elsewhere Engels confesses that, when the old communal system persisted, it built up "the most elementary form of the state, oriental despotism, from India to Russia." See *Anti-Dühring*, p. 210.

⁵ Engels, *Origin of the Family*, pp. 125, 129, 199-200.

of nobles, farmers, and tradesmen, conferring upon the nobles the exclusive privilege of filling office.¹ This was the first attempt to form a state.

The new organ proved to be merely a tool in the hands of the nobility in their struggle with the indebted, impoverished farmer. Public offices multiplied, and presently the army and navy came into existence.² Then Solon appeared to offer relief. He developed the state still further. He divided the population into four classes according to property in land, with rights and duties graduated in proportion.³ The final blow was dealt by the constitution of Kleisthenes, 509 B.C. The population was divided, no longer on the basis of kinship, but into one hundred territorial districts, each one autonomous as regards its own local affairs. The district was the prototype of the American township. "The modern State in its highest development," comments Engels, "ended in the same unit with which the rising State began its career in Athens."⁴ Each ten of these districts formed a higher territorial unit which had to contribute to the national army and navy. Above all stood the Athenian council, the members of which were elected by the vote of the citizens.⁵

The state was complete. It was a "democratic republic," evolved out of the gens society⁶ and called into existence because of the rise of classes within it.⁷ From then on, the state was used as a weapon in behalf of the masters and against their slaves. How well it suited the social conditions was demonstrated by the ensuing prosperity of Greece.⁸

Rome went through similar vicissitudes. It commenced its career with a gens organization and without a state. The king and the senate were elected from the patricians, and the laws were passed at public meetings where each person had the privilege of voting. It was a military democracy, but not a state.⁹ Finally the struggles between the patricians, who were gens members, and the plebeians, who were strangers, forced Servius Tullius to give a constitution which erected a democracy much after the

¹ Engels, *Origin of the Family*, pp. 132-133.

² *Ibid.*, p. 137,

³ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 153-154.

Greek pattern. The force of the new state was used "against the slaves and the so-called proletarians."¹ About the later developments of the Roman state Engels says nothing.

The German tribes who invaded Rome had begun, likewise, with a gens régime;² but the vast territories wrested from the Romans could hardly be administered by this elementary, primitive organism. For this particular reason the state arose.³ Only in this instance, instead of the classical democracies, monarchies established themselves. The heads of the state, the monarchs, were the erstwhile desperate military leaders who would rally about themselves reckless, booty-loving warriors and lead them in private expeditions of warfare and plunder. These rulers surrounded themselves with favorites and courtiers chosen from among their old personal war followers, from freed slaves and serfs, and from romanized Gauls who proved invaluable in administrative affairs because of their knowledge of the Roman language and law and because of their general education. Deeming themselves the owners of all the conquered territories, the new monarchs proceeded to distribute vast amounts of public land among their favorites — in lien, in use for life, or on other terms. This laid the basis of a new nobility. The state, steered by the head and his entourage, turned into a lever of oppression for the poor farmer. By the ninth century, exhausted by exploitation and interminable wars, the farmer was forced to seek the protection of the powerful nobles who wrenched from him the title to his property and compelled him to degenerate into a serf. "The new race, masters and servants," inaugurated the régime of medieval feudalism.⁴

The feudal monarchy was the handmaid of the lord in suppressing the serf, of the guild master in dictating to apprentice and journeyman, and of the country nobility in its strife with the city guilds. Yet how well this state corresponded to the medieval system of production, how far it was a true derivative, an ideal "reflection," of economic reality, is not exactly clear with the two

¹ Engels, *Origin of the Family*, pp. 156-157.

² *Ibid.*, p. 175.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 184, 205.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 174-175, 184-188.

historians. We should expect absolute monarchy, the child of medieval production, to be thoroughly incompatible with the succeeding, antagonistic order of production, namely, capitalism. But instead of corroborations, we encounter a series of perplexing and contradictory statements. Although the logical and legitimate form of government in the Middle Ages, absolute monarchy was in continual strife with the barons for political ascendancy; and as soon as the bourgeois class appeared on the scene and began its struggle for supremacy, the state power became eager to use the new class "as a counterpoise against the nobility."¹ Marx teaches: ". . . and this always has been the fundamental principle of absolute monarchies, to rely for support upon two classes, the feudal landlords and the large stockjobbing capitalists."² Engels declares that absolute monarchy employs either class in order to hold one in check by means of the other.³

The matter is still worse. On the one hand, we meet the declaration that monarchy and the bourgeoisie go hand in hand: during the period of manufacture the bourgeoisie is the "cornerstone of the great monarchies in general," states the *Communist Manifesto*.⁴ On the other hand, we are assured that the two are utterly incompatible: the bourgeoisie struggled with "the feudal lords and their protector, absolute monarchy"; the bourgeoisie "overthrew feudalism and monarchy in order to make of society a bourgeois society."⁵

One thing is certain, the monarchic state, itself the political expression of feudalism, takes the initiative in fostering a mode of production which is in direct opposition to its own economic

¹ *Communist Manifesto*, p. 15.

² *Revolution and Counter Revolution*, p. 52.

³ *Origin of the Family*, p. 209; *Anti-Dühring*, p. 191.

⁴ Page 15. "Royal power, itself a product of bourgeois development. . . ." *Capital*, vol. i, 789. "When in Western Europe the great monarchies developed in consequence of bourgeois civilization. . . ." Engels, "Der Anfang des Endes in Oesterreich," *Der Kampf*, vol. vi, 394. "Firearms from the first were bourgeois instruments of warfare employed on behalf of the rising monarchy against the feudal nobility." Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 195. Italics are mine.

⁵ Engels, "Socialisme de juristes," in *Le mouvement socialiste*, vol. xii, 99. Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 189. The same *Communist Manifesto* (p. 57) declares that the communists in Germany "fight with the bourgeoisie whenever it acts in a revolutionary way against the absolute monarchy." Cf. pp. 23-24.

basis, and in developing a new class which is bound to become its gravedigger. It aids capitalism and the bourgeois class. At the commencement of the capitalistic era the circumstance that certain industrial undertakings required more capital than could be mustered by a private concern "gives rise partly to state subsidies to private persons, as in France in the time of Colbert," and partly to state monopolies.¹ In England in the seventeenth century the bourgeoisie employs "the power of the state . . . to hasten, hothouse fashion, the process of transformation of the feudal mode of production into the capitalist mode, and to shorten the transition."² Capital in the embryo, says Marx, absorbs surplus-labor, "not merely by the force of economic relations, but by the help of the State."³ Everywhere we find the feudal state in alliance with the nascent class that labors to undermine everything feudal!

But this alliance does not endure. As soon as the capitalist mode of production is firmly entrenched, the resulting society and the new material conditions find no adequate expression in the monarchic state with its "medieval rubbish." The political state which is the "official expression of the old civil society" has to go. Hence 1688 in England, 1789 in France, and similar, although less picturesque, cataclysms in other countries. The modern state arises in Holland and Scotland — democracies and republics as modeled by the puritanic Calvin.⁴ Like its predecessors, it is a tool of the ruling class against the downtrodden proletarians. "The modern state, no matter what its form, is essentially a capitalist machine, the state of the capitalists, the ideal personification of the total national capital";⁵ it is "the summarized, reflected form of the economic desires of the class which controls production."⁶ Its executive "is but a committee for managing

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 338; cf. *Civil War in France*, p. 70.

² *Capital*, vol. i, 823-824. We recall that in these two countries and at these two periods absolute monarchy prevailed.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 297.

⁴ Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*, pp. 132, 167; *Revolution and Counter Revolution*, p. 19; *Civil War in France*, p. 70. Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 192; *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. xxii; *Feuerbach*, p. 123.

⁵ Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, pp. 71-72.

⁶ *Idem*, *Feuerbach*, p. 114.

the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.”¹ It is a symbol “of the national power of capital over labor, of a public force organized for social enslavement, of an engine of class despotism,” is Marx’s verdict.²

It will go under. The modern state is the last in the historical series. Under socialism it is extinguished, because economic facts will no longer call for it. Till the present day, society could not well dispense with classes. Till the present day, the systems of production have not been perfectly developed; the productive forces have been meager; and man has not learned to contend with nature effectively, so as to wrest from her the necessaries of life in the minimum of time. He has therefore been constrained to expend so much of his time on the struggle for a living that he has had little leisure left for the participation in functions that concern the common, social interests. Accordingly, there was need for a division of labor in this particular, so that the bulk of society followed their individual pursuits in quest of a livelihood, while a small number of people were left to look after general social affairs. This division of labor gave origin to classes, and created for the ruling class the opportunity to utilize its power for the exploitation of the masses. But at last the point of historical evolution has been reached, when the productive forces have grown so tremendously that each man has sufficient leisure to partake in matters of common concern. The political domination of a particular class is no longer to be tolerated. Thus teaches Engels.³

When the socialist society is established, there will be no classes, no oppression, and “As soon as there is no longer any social class to be held in subjection . . . nothing more remains to be repressed, and a special repressive force, a State, is no longer necessary.”⁴ “There will no longer be political power, properly speaking, since political power is simply the official form of the antagonisms in civil society.”⁵ Accordingly, “The society that is to reorganize

Communist Manifesto, p. 15.

Marx, *Civil War in France*, p. 71.

Socialism, Utopian and Scientific, pp. 78-79. *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 210-211.

Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. 76.

Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 190. Cf. *Communist Manifesto*, p. 42.

production on the basis of free and equal association of the producers, will transfer the machinery of state where it will then belong: into the Museum of Antiquities by the side of the spinning wheel and the bronze axe.”¹

Closely allied with the state is law. Legal enactments are the chief medium through which the state expresses its mastery and coercion over society. Like the state, law is not the product of ideas and reason, but is merely a shadow of economic conditions. “The jurist imagines he operates with *a priori* propositions, but they are only economic mirrorings,” says Engels.² First appear economic facts, such as production and the corresponding economic relations; when they are solidified by experience and custom, law arrives to acknowledge and sanctify the facts.³ Law is nothing but a paraphrasing of economic reality. “Truly it is necessary to be entirely innocent of all historical knowledge not to know that in all times sovereigns have had to submit to the economic conditions and have never made laws for them. Legislation, political as well as civil, could do no more than give expression to the will of the economic conditions.”⁴ For example, under the patriarchal, caste, feudal, and guild régimes there was division of labor according to appropriate fixed regulations. But such regulations were not created by a legislator. “Originally born of the conditions of material production, it was not till much later that they [these forms of division of labor] were established as laws.”⁵ Similarly, as soon as labor combinations became a fact in England, the law of 1824 did not delay in pronouncing them legal; and the old restrictions against labor combinations were relaxed.⁶

The content of law is the complex of economic facts flowing from a given mode of production.⁷ The spirit of law is protection

¹ Engels, *Origin of the Family*, p. 211. For further discussion of the state after the fall of capitalism see below, pp. 253-258.

² Letter of October 27, 1890, reprinted in Labriola's *Socialisme et philosophie*, p. 253.

³ Marx, *Capital*, vol. iii, 921.

⁴ Idem, *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 90.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

⁷ Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 117.

of property. Each productive system supplies and governs the motives of the dominant classes. The masters have property to defend, enemies to subdue, interests to protect. They declare their desires to their servant, the state, and presently appropriate laws are enacted. "Your jurisprudence," cries the *Communist Manifesto* to the bourgeoisie, "is but the will of your class made into a law for all, a will whose essential character and direction are determined by the economic conditions of existence of your class."¹ This will is the will of property. "Does not the need for notaries presuppose a given civil right, which is only an expression of a certain development of property, that is to say, production?" queries Marx.² Montesquieu labored over the problem of the "spirit of laws." To Marx the problem is easy, and he could have spared him the trouble. Marx points out that "Linguet overthrew Montesquieu's illusory *Esprit des lois* with one word; '*L'Esprit des lois, c'est la propriété!*'"³

But it by no means follows that laws are considered by our two writers as inert, pale shadows. Legal enactments react on the economic world.⁴ Just as the state can have an effect on economic conditions by hastening and nursing the process of transition and by consolidating and augmenting the ground won, so can laws. The English Factory Acts are an example. The extension of these laws crowds the numerous small enterprises out of existence and hastens their combination into a few large-scale industries; it destroys undertakings run by antiquated methods and brings them under the sway of capital. In this manner the law accelerates the concentration of capital and the predominance of the factory system; extends the direct opposition of the exploited classes to the power of capital; intensifies and spreads the anarchy and the catastrophes of capitalist production, and, by the destruction of the domestic industry, cuts off the last resort of the "redundant population." "By maturing the material conditions, and the combination on a social scale of the processes of produc-

¹ Page 35. Cf. Engels, "Socialisme de juristes," in *Le mouvement socialiste*, vol. xii, 119.

² *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 45.

³ *Capital*, vol. i, 675 n.

⁴ Engels, in the letter last cited, p. 253.

tion, it matures the contradictions and antagonisms of the capitalist form of production, and thereby provides, along with the elements for the formation of a new society, the forces for exploding the old one."¹

Yet we must keep in mind that laws can boast such efficacy only if they run with the tide of economic currents. These very English Factory Acts, Marx pronounces, are "just as much the necessary product of modern industry as cotton yarns, self-actors, and electric telegraph."² "They develop gradually out of the circumstances as natural laws of the modern mode of production."³ Laws that are not based on economic conditions, or that are out of accord with them, are devoid of vitality. They vanish as the shadow vanishes when the substance is gone. French law attempts to perpetuate small-scale farming. But in vain, says Marx. "In spite of these laws land is concentrating again." The laws in England perpetuating large landed property are, however, of significance, because they are in agreement with the prevailing system of production.⁴

It follows that each mode of production, carrying in its train a realignment of property relations, alters the character of previously existing laws. "'Positive' law may, and must, alter its decisions in proportion as the requirements of social, that is, economic development, change."⁵ Each historical mode of production is bound up with its peculiar codes of law. Laws are not eternal, they are relative.

The gens knows no law, in the strict sense. The primitive accepted ways of managing common affairs and of dealing with infractions are time-honored customs and traditions; they are not laws handed down by legislators and enforced by police and prison. With the dissolution of the gens, "this legal conception of free property in land arises," as well as laws of succession of property and paternal rights.⁶ Already Theseus gave a "common

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 552. Cf. pp. 519-520, 522.

² *Ibid.*, p. 526.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

⁴ Marx, *Critique of Political Economy*, appendix, p. 289.

⁵ *Capital*, vol. iii, 722 n.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 723; Engels, *Origin of the Family*, p. 146.

Athenian law, standing above the legal traditions of the tribes and gentes.”¹ Then came Solon and others. Greek law was the law of the creditor over the debtor, and of the master over the slave; the state permitted class struggle “in a so-called ‘legal’ form.”² Rome went much further in this direction and performed something startling. With a system of commodity exchange less developed even than in Greece, it elaborated a body of law which is an “almost perfect expression of the juridical relations” corresponding to commodity production, and which could therefore be easily adapted, some seventeen centuries later, to capitalist conditions. “Roman law was founded and developed as the most perfect system of jurisprudence based on private property with which we are acquainted.” Here, too, it was the law of freemen; the slaves had no rights.³

In the Middle Ages law was an instrument favoring the feudal lords and the guilds. It was the dispenser of privileges for one class and of restrictions for the other. “Local provisions of a legal character, differential taxation, exceptional laws of every description,” deluged society and impeded free movement. The rights of the subject class to the pursuit of happiness was sacrificed to the interests of the dominant class, regardless and by means of law.⁴

As soon as capitalism established itself, it swept away all the old legal fetters to enterprise in country or town. The new class was actuated by new interests, and new interests gave birth to new laws.⁵ Modern law appeared in varying forms in different countries. In Western Europe it was an adaptation of the old Roman law to the new conditions. The best example is France, where the Revolution effected an entire break with feudalism and created the *Code Civil*, that “classical code for bourgeois society.” Elsewhere, as in the case of the Prussian land law, “pseudo-en-

¹ Engels, *Origin of the Family*, p. 132.

² *Ibid.*, p. 205.

³ Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. xxvii; *Feuerbach*, p. 115; *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 139-140.

⁴ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 142; *Feuerbach*, p. 87.

⁵ *Capital*, vol. iii, 723. Engels, “Socialisme de juristes,” in *Le mouvement socialiste*, vol. xii, 98, 102.

lightened and moralizing jurists" drew up a system of law to suit the particular conditions. Only in England, where the capitalists and the feudal nobility effected a compromise, there is a harking back to the "barbarous language" of feudal common law, which corresponds to capitalism, "the thing expressed, just as English spelling corresponds to English pronunciation — *vous écrivez Londres et vous prononcez Constantinople*, said a Frenchman." Yet we must not forget, Engels admonishes us, that this very old English law preserved through the ages the best part of the Germanic personal freedom, local self-government, and aversion to interference, and transmitted these safeguards to America and the colonies.¹ But no matter in what form modern law is found, it is the law of the stronger class. The bourgeoisie required non-interference in enterprise, unfettered competition and, as a corollary, equality of rights of individuals to freedom of contract and agreement. In essence, this equality of rights is nothing but the equal right of all the capitalists to exploit labor. Equality of rights means to the laborer the right to sell his labor for bare subsistence and to fare no better than the slave or the serf.²

What happens to law with the advent of socialism is not mentioned. But it may be reasonable to surmise that a society not cursed with class antagonisms, unencumbered with property entanglements, and proceeding on the basis of brotherly coöperation, will know no litigations and will need no legislators and barristers' briefs.

The domain of ethics, like that of politics and law, is found in close dependence on economic exigencies. Each mode of production, with its material conditions and class relations, creates a complex of facts which constitute the environment that breeds ideas and engenders sentiments with respect to questions of morality and right conduct. What is good and what is bad is not decided by criteria of eternal justice concocted by some idle brain, but is judged in the light of this factual material reality into which man is born, and which he absorbs as his mental food

¹ Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 115, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. xxvii.

² *Feuerbach*, pp. 87-88; *Le mouvement socialiste*, vol. xii, 98.

throughout life. His attitude, his way of regarding conduct, is consciously or unconsciously molded in him by the form of production and by the conditions and classes that result from it. The dominant class sets the standards, and that system of morality pervades society which is in keeping with the rule of this class, and which justifies and reinforces the interests of the exploiters. Morality is essentially class morality. "Mankind consciously or unconsciously shapes its moral views in accordance with the material facts upon which in the last instance the class existence is based — upon the economic conditions under which production and exchange are carried on."¹

The impact of economic actuality throws us into appropriate modes of conduct. This actuality alone delimits our ideas of justice and imparts meaning to them. To talk of justice which has not been forged on the anvil of economic fact is to talk an incomprehensible language. To clamor for equitable compensation under the wage system "is the same as to clamor for freedom on the basis of the slavery system. What you think just or equitable is out of the question. The question is, what is necessary and unavoidable with a given system of production?"² What harmonizes with economic conditions is moral, what does not is not. We express our indignation at slavery and are convinced that slavery is wrong. This attitude merely declares the fact that our present economic system is incompatible with such a régime, and no longer requires it. Had present conditions called for it, slavery would not appear to us a scandalous institution. The Greeks did not deem slavery wrong, nor did the southern cotton planters.³

¹ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 128. "We state, on the contrary," Engels continues, "that up to the present time all ethical theory is in the last instance a testimony to the existence of certain economic conditions prevailing in any community at any particular time. And in proportion as society developed class antagonisms, morality became a class morality and either justified the interests and domination of the ruling class, or, as soon as a subject class became strong enough, justified revolt against the domination of the ruling class and the interests of the subject class." *Ibid.*, pp. 128-129.

² Marx, *Value, Price and Profits*, p. 76.

³ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 209. "If the moral sentiment of the mass regards an economic fact — as, formerly, slavery and serfdom — as unjust, that proves that this fact itself is a survival; that other economic facts are established, thanks to which the first has become insupportable, intolerable." Engels, preface to Marx's *Poverty of Philosophy*, pp. 14-15.

It all depends on the form of production. "The justice of the transactions between the agents of production rests on the fact that these transactions arise as natural consequences from the conditions of production. . . . Slavery on the basis of capitalist production is unjust."¹

The same basis underlies the cry of injustice when leveled at existing institutions. While a given régime of production is in the blooming stage of its development, everyone is content with it, even its victims. But as soon as it has traversed the major portion of its path, as soon as contradictions arrive, and signs of a new order disclose themselves, dissatisfactions arise, the old institutions appear unjust, and appeals are made to morality and justice. This change of mind, this appeal "is only proof that in the modes of production and exchange changes have silently taken place with which the social order, adapted to earlier economic conditions, is no longer in keeping."² It is an indication that the corrosive action of the antithesis has set in, and that the dawn of a new synthesis is not far off. It is a symptom; and the task of science is not to join in the cry of eternal, natural justice, but rather to study the character of the wrongs, to point out that they are manifestations of the inevitable dialectic, and to indicate how, within the old, the new social order is striking roots and is bringing a new promise. The feelings stirred up by poets are mere sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. Talk of justice is of no value. It guides to no comprehension of the disease, and it provides no cure.³

It follows that in matters of ethics the range of final truths is exceedingly limited. There is no eternal, immutable moral law built on sovereign principles that transcend all time and all place. Morality is sensitively relative to variations in material facts. As the mode of production changes, people look at things from a different angle, apply a different set of standards, and accordingly render different judgments as to right and wrong conduct. New classes have new interests, and new interests require new sanc-

¹ Marx, *Capital*, vol. iii, 399.

² Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, pp. 45-46.

³ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 179-180.

tions, new ways of envisaging good and evil. When a subject class overpowers its rival, what was good before is good no longer, and what was regarded as wrong in the past may become right.¹ "From people to people, from age to age, there have been such changes in the ideas of good and evil that these concepts are contradictory in different periods and among different peoples."² Even within a given society and at a given time, every class, every profession, has its own code of morals determined by its own material conditions and interests.³

True, — and this has happened hundreds and thousands of times, — a "friend of humanity" may arise who claims to believe in finite truths of morality and justice. He explains that all former inventors of eternal truths have been fools and charlatans, and urges that he, "the newly arisen prophet," has at length evolved the only true and perfect system of morals, composed of imperishable ingredients, and valid for all ages. Yet, says Engels, his scheme is not what it vaunts itself to be. The best he can attempt to do is to construct his system out of material drawn, not from the external world, but from his consciousness, on the promptings of which he places supreme reliance. But what is the content of his consciousness? It is a store of moral ideals and philosophical concepts, not accumulated out of the void, but derived from the social conditions of his environment or from the perusal of learned treatises. Try as he may to divorce his system from a particular time and place, the historical reality that environs him, driven out through the door, comes in through the window. His system is after all merely a distorted image of his age, invalid for any other time.⁴

However, despite the bold declarations, it is easy to discern that Engels's mind on this question is disturbed. He is aware that people will remark: "Good is still not evil and evil is not good; if good and evil are confused, all morality is abolished and each may do what he will." Engels grapples with this objection. He argues that the problem of morality is not so easily settled as this remark

¹ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 129.

² *Ibid.*, p. 127.

³ *Idem*, *Feuerbach*, p. 89.

⁴ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 123-124, 131.

implies, and that, in fact, we do not know what is evil and what is good. He adduces proof from the circumstance that in modern society there are "three contemporaneous and coexistent" theories of ethics: "the Christian-feudal, a survival of the early days of faith," with its subdivision into Catholic and Protestant branches; the bourgeois; and the proletarian. Thus the three classes of modern society have three distinctive systems of ethics. This proves, he says, that it is not easy to find absolute truth regarding right and wrong. He admits that these systems have much in common. But this is only natural, since they all evolved through history and have a common historical foundation. "Further, for approximately similar economic stages there must necessarily be a coincidence of similar stages of economic development, and ethical theories must of necessity coincide with a greater or less degree of closeness." For example, as soon as private property appears, the ethical precept "thou shalt not steal" arrives. In a society in which "the motive for theft did not exist" only the weak-minded would steal, and the precept would be meaningless.¹ This explanation given, Engels seems to rest satisfied, and he leaves the question.

Inveterate foes of the state, which is to them the apotheosis of class oppression, Marx and Engels are friends of morality.² They would merely disembarass it of all elements of sentimentalism. Bent on thoroughly rationalizing the domain of ethics, they will hear none of the talk of brotherly sympathy, of the "old cant love one another, fall into each other's arms," and none of the universal intoxication with good feeling and forgiveness. They will build better. Heretofore morality has been a class morality, although each succeeding class struggle in history has placed morality on a higher level. The reign of socialism will finally inaugurate "real human morality superior to class morality and its traditions." As compared with previous ethical systems, the socialistic, that is, the proletarian one, will possess "the most ele-

¹ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 127-128.

² Sorel is quite right when he states that *Capital* abounds in appreciations of morality. See A. Labriola, *Essais sur la conception matérialiste de l'histoire*, Sorel's preface, p. 16.

ments of truth," and will endure longest.¹ Socialist ethics will not be based on sentimental talk of eternal justice, but will be deeply rooted in, and will draw its vitality from, such propitious material conditions as cannot help nursing a superior type of conduct. There will be no class oppression, coöperation will be the ruling principle of human relations, and each individual will have unlimited facilities for the free development of his capacities and inclinations. Socialism will supplant class morality by human morality.

Religion occupies a unique position among the institutions and ideologies. The institutions thus far discussed are most intimately affiliated to economic conditions; but religion appears furthest removed from such a foundation, because the connection between this ideology and its material basis is obscured by many intervening links.² While the origin of the state, of law, and even of morality is to be traced to economic phenomena, while these institutions exist primarily to perpetuate class domination, it is apparent from the writings of Marx and Engels that the genesis of religion and its continued existence do not find their roots in self-interest, property, and class rule, but rather in a human psychological propensity. Man has the disposition to mystify, personify, and clothe with supernatural attributes everything that presents itself as a riddle to him. He is awed by forces that dominate over him, and that are incomprehensible to his mind. He is not inclined to pass them over with unconcern, but is, on the contrary, impelled by inner promptings to brood over them and to react to them. The reaction expresses itself as a deification of such forces. This is the origin of religion and its *raison d'être* even at present.³

¹ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 129, 127; *Feuerbach*, p. 89. Marx, too, is of the opinion that of all people the proletarians possess the most delicate moral susceptibilities. In his inaugural address to the first "International" he calls upon the workers to master the mysteries of international politics and to watch over the diplomatic activities of their respective governments, in order to prevent international crimes and in order to "vindicate the laws of morality and justice which ought to regulate the relations among individuals as the supreme laws of intercourse among nations." *Inauguraladresse der internationalen Arbeiter-Association*, pp. 29-30.

² Engels, *Feuerbach*, pp. 116, 117-118.

³ Yet even here economic causation is relinquished very reluctantly. In a letter Engels admits that it would be pedantic to seek economic causes for all the prehis-

In the history of the human race there have been two groups of secret phenomena that have harassed the mind of man, and have prepared the nourishing subsoil of religion. In primitive days man is constantly in close contact with nature, because in his struggle for existence he has to contend with her face to face. But nature is a sphinx to him, and her phenomena hang over him as inexorable and mystifying powers. He has not learned yet the essential character of natural occurrences, the laws of their manifestations, and the means by which to control them. His whole environment is teeming with uncanny puzzles. These puzzles he worships. He prostrates himself before nature. Thus originates religion, which is "nothing but a fantastic reflection in men's minds of the external forces which dominate their everyday existence. . . . In the beginning of history it is the forces of nature which first produce this reflection."¹ All religion has "its roots in the limited and ignorant ideas of the condition of savagery," "in certain erroneous and barbaric conceptions."²

In the course of time another complex of unaccountable forces makes its appearance. They are social in character, and they assume greater importance in proportion as society institutes elaborate systems of division and coöperation of labor, lengthy processes of production, intricate forms of exchange, and the anarchy of competition among producers. New mysteries descend then on the human race. The commodity begins to tantalize man's consciousness! Man does not comprehend its true nature, nor can he trace its destiny when it deserts his hands. He is unable to envisage it as a thing in which warm human energy has been embodied. When it has gone through the various stages of manufacture, it comes out as a product of a hierarchy of laborers, of "social labor"; but when thrown into circulation and expressed in terms of money, it emerges as an objective, impersonal

toric absurdities of religion. However, in the same connection he says that all the fantastic religious notions of nature, man, spirits, and magic, while not possessing a positive economic foundation, have mainly a negative one. See Engels's letter in *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, vol. xxvi, no. 2, p. 874; or A. Labriola's *Socialisme et philosophie*, p. 254; or L. Woltmann's *Materialismus*, p. 243.

¹ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 256; Marx, *Capital*, vol. i, 91.

² Engels, *Feuerbach*, pp. 57, 118.

entity, disclosing no connection with human labor and concealing all hints as to the relations of the men that had shaped it. The commodity is mysterious; it is endowed with what Marx calls "fetishism."¹ Moreover, the competitive anarchic régime, under which commodities are made, hides within its chaos "external coercive laws" of nature which vent their rage in constantly recurring industrial crises. The commodity dominates man as nature dominated the savage; and is as much of a riddle to him. To this phenomenon he reacts likewise in his fantastic manner — with the "misty creations of religion."²

However, the contents of religion and the purposes it is made to subserve, once it has come into existence, present no different case from that exhibited by other institutions or realms of thought. Religion appears on the surface as a product of the mind, which builds for itself "a realm in the clouds"; as an independent ideology playing a part in man's life, and affecting his conduct. It seems as if man were "governed by the product of his own brain."³ But all this is more apparent than real. The mind cannot engage in weaving fantasies that have no association with reality, and that grow solely by their own peculiar process of accumulation. Religious sentiment cannot be abstracted from the "ensemble of the conditions of society" and from the course of history.⁴ "The religious world is but the reflex of the real world."⁵ The content of religion is drawn from reality, and the purpose of religion is the same as the purpose of other institutions: to aid the ruling class in holding the other class in subjection and in delusion. It is clear therefore that while religion displays a peculiarly stubborn adherence to tradition, its form does change none the less; and the changes are wrought by economic forces and by the circumstances that surround the struggling classes.⁶ The initial impulse of religion, as is evident in Marx and Engels, is derived from a psychological source; but in substance and aims,

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 81 ff.

² Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 257-258.

³ Marx, appendix iv in Engels's *Feuerbach*, p. 131; *Capital*, vol. i, 681.

⁴ Marx, appendices iv, vi, vii in Engels's *Feuerbach*, pp. 131-132.

⁵ *Capital*, vol. i, 91.

⁶ Engels, *Feuerbach*, pp. 119, 124-125.

forms and evolution, religion is guided and molded by the modes of production and by class interest.

Strong believers in morality, they reject religion with a cynical smile. Their atheism is a direct consequence of their determination to rationalize everything. Religion is a chimerical conception, a hunt for mysterious forces, an epitome of idle riddles. The word religion in general means to them illusion, delusion, and worship of appearances; it symbolizes aversion to investigation and fear of truly understanding a thing. Any cult of mere appearances they stigmatize as religion.¹ To place religion on a reasonable basis is the same as to conceive of modern chemistry as alchemy. It cannot be done. Religion cannot exist without its God, or alchemy without its philosopher's stone.² It means little, and explains nothing. It has become the fashion, Marx relates, to explain the progress of history by Providence, God's will, the divine end. This "explains nothing. It is at most a declamatory form, one manner among others of paraphrasing the facts." It is "a complete negation of all reasoning."³

As an institution in society, they dislike religion as the incarnation of hypocrisy. Professing lofty principles, it never fails to ally itself with the oppressor of mankind, is always absorbed in petty self-interest, and is at all times ready to abandon its cherished tenets at the sight of gold. They therefore seldom forego an opportunity to dart at it their shafts of irony and cynicism. Marx is certain that "The English Established Church, for example, will more readily pardon an attack on 38 of its 39 articles than on $\frac{1}{39}$ of its income."⁴ The Greek poet hailed the water-wheel as an invention that will diminish the drudgery of the slaves and Marx exclaims: "Oh! those heathens! They understood . . . nothing of political economy and Christianity." They did not see, he continues, that machinery was the

surest means of lengthening the working day. They perhaps excused the slavery of one on the ground that it was a means to the full development of

¹ Cf. *Capital*, vol. iii, 967.

² Engels, *Feuerbach*, pp. 79-80.

³ Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*, pp. 129-130; *Value, Price and Profits*, p. 13.

⁴ *Capital*, vol. i, 15.

another. But to preach slavery of the masses, in order that a few crude and half-educated parvenus might become "eminent spinners," "extensive sausage makers," and "influential shoe-black dealers"—to do this, they lacked the bump of Christianity.¹

Religion was in full bloom in the gens society. That was the time when man found himself in close contact with nature, and when she was to him an overwhelming enigma. He worshipped the natural forces, and devised multifarious elaborate personifications of them. Later, when social relations became more complex, to the natural secrets incomprehensible social phenomena were added. We find in the gens order priests, religious rites and festivals, religious sorcery, mysteries, and societies with peculiar initiations for new members.² Groups of kindred peoples had similar religious ideas, and as the tribes separated, the religions differentiated and developed along distinct lines under the influence of the particular circumstances amidst which each tribe existed. Each tribe developed its own mythology and worshipped its own gods, which were esteemed as its ancestors and as the defenders of its territory. The deities were endowed with supernatural powers, but their sway was confined to the tribal territory alone. Beyond the frontiers other tribes bestowed sovereignty on other gods. With the extinction of a tribe or a nation, its gods went out of existence. Gradually, through a "natural" process of abstraction or "distillation," the many gods of a tribe or a nation were consolidated into "one all-embracing God." This is the origin of monotheism, and the best example is "the Hebrew exclusively national God, Jahve."³

To what particular changes religion was subjected in order to adapt it to the new economic conditions that followed upon the arrival of classical slavery, neither Marx nor Engels specifies. Engels tells us only that "historically the latest product of the

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 446. "Tucker was a parson and a Tory, but, for the rest, an honorable man." *Ibid.*, p. 834 n. The fact that the linen is value "is made manifest by its equality with the coat, just as the sheep's nature of a Christian is shown in his resemblance to the Lamb of God." *Ibid.*, p. 60. See also *Ibid.*, p. 115 and n.

² Engels, *Origin of the Family*, pp. 106-107, 109-112, 119, 146, 153, 172; *Anti-Dühring*, p. 207.

³ *Capital*, vol. i, 91; Engels, *Origin of the Family*, pp. 120-122, 125, 128, *Feuerbach*, pp. 57, 119, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 257.

Greek vulgar philosophy" was monotheism; that Rome had its national God; and that imperial Rome, desirous of becoming a world empire "by means of a world-wide religion," indiscriminately provided altars in the capital for indigenous gods as well as for those belonging to the conquered nationalities.¹

When the régime of ancient slavery broke up and the medieval mode of production was inaugurated, a new religion did not fail to come. It was not, however, originated by the new conditions and by the beneficiaries of the new order to suit and to promote their interests. It was rather a religion that had come into life long before the old order went under. This religion had been born among the conglomerate, heterogeneous masses that had been hurled together by the Roman fist, and that were writhing under the Roman heel. The small debtor farmer in the country, the lowly freeman and the slave in the city, the nationalities dissolved by Rome or subjected to it — all these differing elements had divergent interests and problems. Some yearned for national independence, others dreamed of freedom, still others saw that they could escape misery if only delivered from oppressive creditors, heartless officials, and devastating wars. There was but one thing in common to all of them: misery and destitution, and hopes for a better day. Truly, they were the laboring and the heavily laden.²

Under such circumstances only one common outlet was conceivable: the hope of a better world after death and the spiritual consolation that the worldly troubles and vicissitudes were insignificant and evanescent, but that the kingdom of heaven was everlasting. This the Christian religion supplied. It glorified life after death and the immortality of the soul, it promised retribution in the future world to authors of earthly iniquities, and compensation for past sufferings; and it pictured the sweetness of heaven and the horrors of hell.³ Already the ancient Greeks reached the "tedious idea of personal immortality." Only they

¹ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 257, *Feuerbach*, pp. 119-120.

² Engels, "Zur Geschichte des Urchristentums," *Neue Zeit*, vol. xiii, no. 1, pp. 4, 36.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

were forced to it, not by a desire for solace, but by philosophical speculations as to how the thought-process was carried on within man; they decided that the soul was charged with this function, and that it was a separate entity residing within him. To the Greeks the idea of immortality was unwelcome as a positive misfortune.¹ Not so with the Christians. Such a belief was a beloved device born of the desire to escape the hopelessness of reality. Anton Menger, in his *Right to the Whole Produce of Labor*, queries why socialism failed to come upon the fall of Rome — since, previously to its fall, the same symptoms existed which in present, capitalistic, society are pointed to as the heralds of socialism; namely, concentration of property and increasing misery among the proletarians. Engels retorts: Menger does not see that socialism did come indeed, but under the circumstances it could not have been of the terrestrial variety, it could only be the socialism of the future world, that is, Christianity!²

The new religion was purely a mass movement and a bewildering mixture of elements. Rome, Greece, and especially Asia Minor and Egypt, furnished the arena. Oriental religions, popularized Greek philosophy, Jewish theology, and particularly stoicism, made the contributions. Mystical mathematicians, alchemists, swindlers, impostors, were among its composers; symbolism, cabala, visions, and the superstitions of the credulous, ignorant, downtrodden mass, constituted its ingredients. Leaders there were aplenty; nevertheless, it was essentially a mass product, the child of conditions.³ Engels sees in it an admirable parallel to the fortunes of socialism. Both have their start among the lowly, both are mass movements, both struggle for a better world to come, both are torn by sects, both ultimately emerge triumphant.⁴

Here we come upon a singular development. This ideology, instead of being crushed by the upper class, just as any attempt of an exploited class to construct a system of its own is crushed

¹ Engels, *Feuerbach*, pp. 56-57.

² *Neue Zeit*, vol. xiii, no. 1, p. 4.

³ Engels, *Neue Zeit*, vol. xiii, no. 1, pp. 6-10, 40; *Feuerbach*, pp. 79, 120.

⁴ *Neue Zeit*, vol. xiii, no. 1, pp. 4, 12.

by its antagonists, is ultimately adopted by the oppressors. In the reign of Constantine Christianity becomes the state religion in Rome. To Engels this merely proves that the new institution suited the times. "Enough," he exclaims, "the fact that after 250 years it was a state religion shows that it was a religion answering to the circumstances of the times."¹

Christianity, when examined closely, was quite earthly, and not full of elevated ethical ideals. It recognized but one equality, the "equal taint of original sin." The fact that occasionally, in its early days, it endorsed common property and mutual aid was due more to the pressure of misery and to persecution than to any ideals of human equality.² As soon as it gained recognition by the state, the Church eagerly joined the ranks of those engrossed in sordid affairs, and enlisted itself as an agency of oppression. Throughout history it has been inspired by avidity for wealth and power. It took "part in the slavery of the Roman empire for centuries. It never prevented the slave trade of Christians later on, neither of the Germans in the North, nor of the Venetians on the Mediterranean, nor the negro traffic of later years."³ In the ninth and tenth centuries it imitated the trickery of the nobles, requiring of the harassed small farmer who sought its protection to transfer to it the title to his land and to forfeit his independence. It thus helped in the process of reducing the free farmer to a serf, "for the greater glory of God."⁴ The transmission of property by testament before death had been introduced early in Athens and Rome, but in Germany it was originated by the priests "in order that the honest German might bequeath his property to the church without any interference."⁵ In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when the German nobility oppressed the serfs with renewed vigor, "The spiritual lords helped themselves in a more simple manner. They forged documents by which the rights of the peasants were curtailed and their duties increased."⁶

¹ Feuerbach, p. 120.

² Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 140.

³ Engels, *Origin of the Family*, p. 181.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 182, 186.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

⁶ Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, appendix, p. 110.

Throughout the Middle Ages the Church preached heaven, but strove to possess as much as possible of the earth.

The Church so well adapted itself to medieval economic conditions and pursued material interests with such zeal that it became the stronghold and the symbol of feudalism. It united feudal western Europe into one political system, bestowed on the feudal institutions the glory of divine consecration, organized its own hierarchy after the feudal pattern, and owned one-third of the soil inhabited by Catholics. In the realms of ideology it held no laxer sway. Everything bore a religious imprint. Philosophy, politics, jurisprudence were transfused with theology and subordinated to its authority, illustrating the influence of one ideology upon another. The voice of science was stilled; it dared not overstep the boundaries set by faith, and it languished.¹ The medieval mind was dominated by religion, could express itself only in terms of faith; and social movements, even social uprisings, had a religious garb.² However, Marx reminds us that we are not witnessing here an independent ideological factor, Catholicism, exercising an overpowering influence over the lives of men. "The Middle Ages could not live on Catholicism, nor the ancient world on politics. On the contrary, it is the mode in which they gained a livelihood that explains why here politics, and there Catholicism, played the chief part."³

When the bourgeoisie came to power, it needed its own religion. The new religion appeared in the form of the protestant heresy, and first of all among the Albigenses in southern France, at the period of the greatest growth of free cities.⁴ The rising class, intent on demolishing the old order, had to direct its attack on Catholicism, the citadel of medievalism. The first phase of the conflict came with the Lutheran Reformation in Germany. But the power of the bourgeoisie there was insufficient, and the revolt proved a miscarriage. "The Lutheran Reformation produced a new creed indeed, a religion adapted to absolute monarchy";

¹ Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. xx; *Feuerbach*, p. 121; *Le mouvement socialiste*, vol. xii, 97.

² Engels, *Feuerbach*, pp. 121, 80.

³ *Capital*, vol. i, 94 n.

⁴ Engels, *Le mouvement socialiste*, vol. xii, 98; *Feuerbach*, p. 121.

but the victory was gathered by the landed gentry, instead of the bourgeoisie, and this circumstance removed Germany for nearly three centuries from the ranks of "independent, energetic progressive countries."¹ Then came Calvin with his "natural French acuteness," and won the day.

Calvinism performed a great function during the second act of the bourgeois struggle, that is, during the Great Rebellion in England in the seventeenth century; and finally triumphed when it was incorporated, in large part, in the restored Established Church of England. True, in France it was subdued in 1685. "But what was the good?" Presently the free-thinker Pierre Bayle became active; in 1694 Voltaire was born; and before long the army of encyclopedists, equipped with the mordant materialism or with the deism imported from England and modified by Cartesianism, subjected all religion to the devastating fire of skeptical criticism and rationalism. The French bourgeois became atheistic. "Christianity entered upon the last lap of the race," and could no longer provide the religious clothing for revolutionary ardor.

The third act of the drama, the French Revolution, founded its appeal on political and juristic ideals, and scorned religion. Not Protestants, but free-thinkers filled the National Assembly. No one saw the need of religion, and "everybody knows what a mess Robespierre made of the attempt" to introduce one.² How it came to pass that, despite all this thoroughgoing atheism, capitalist France ultimately reverted to religion, — and not to Protestantism even, but to feudal Catholicism, — we fail to learn from Engels. He abruptly closes his history of religion, saying, "And that is enough on this part of the subject."³

Protestantism in its various forms is in spirit and application preëminently a religion of capitalism. In a society which produces commodities with their inherent fetishism, "Christianity with its *cultus* of abstract man, more especially in its bourgeois

¹ Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 122, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, pp. xix-xxi.

² Engels, *Feuerbach*, pp. 80, 123-124, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, pp. xxii, xxvi.

³ *Feuerbach*, p. 125.

developments, Protestantism, Deism, etc., is the most fitting form of religion.”¹ When the ancient world passed out, the ancient religions were “overcome” by Christianity; when feudalism died, Christian sentiment “succumbed” to eighteenth-century rationalism, and the idea of “religious liberty and freedom of conscience merely gave expression to the sway of free competition within the domain of knowledge,” even as free competition was reigning within the sphere of production.² Calvinism was the “natural religious garb” of the interests of the bourgeoisie. Its doctrine of predestination was no more than the reflection of the economic fact that in commercial competition success or failure did not depend on personal exertion and deserts, but on “superior economic powers,” incomprehensible and uncontrollable. This doctrine was born at a time when economic transformations took place, when new lands and new routes were discovered, and when even “the most sacred economic articles of faith — the value of gold and silver — began to totter and to break down.”³

Protestantism had a marked effect on the development of capitalism and in setting up states required by this new era of production. It aided England during the “bourgeois upheaval.” “The process of forcible expropriation of the people received in the sixteenth century a new and frightful impulse from the Reformation.”⁴ By changing almost all the traditional holidays into workdays, it “plays an important part in the genesis of capital.”⁵ Calvinism freed Holland from German and Spanish rule. This creed was organized on democratic and republican principles, “and where the kingdom of God was republicanized, could the kingdoms of this world remain subject to monarchs, bishops, and lords?” Hence the republics in Geneva and Holland, the active republican parties in England and Scotland — all founded by Calvinism.⁶ But it must be emphasized that Protestantism, like Catholicism, was not a ruling agency creating institutions accord-

¹ Marx, *Capital*, vol. i, 91.

² *Communist Manifesto*, p. 39.

³ Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. xxii, *Feuerbach*, pp. 122-123.

⁴ *Capital*, vol. i, 792.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 303 n.

⁶ Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. xxii, *Feuerbach*, p. 123.

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ing to its own designs. It was the offspring of the bourgeois régime of production, and in all these performances it acted merely as the child doing the bidding of its progenitor.

As regards the attitude to class relations in society, Protestantism, like its predecessor, is found in the service of the oppressor. It does not uphold lofty principles fearlessly and steadfastly, but allows property to take precedence over everything else, even religion. Atheism is *culpa levis* as compared with an attack on private property.¹ In England a worker would occasionally be condemned to imprisonment if he worked in his garden on a Sunday; but he is punished for breach of contract if he does not report to the factory on Sunday, "even if it be from a religious whim." Sabbath-breaking is a crime, but not "if it occurs in the process of expanding capital."² The Church winked at the unspeakable atrocities in the colonies, and tolerated negro slavery.³ The representatives and leaders of religion look down on the exploited masses, and ally themselves with the ruling class and the state in maintaining the disinherited and the lowly in subjection. "The 'holy ones' . . . show their Christianity by the humility with which they bear the overwork, the privations, and the hunger of others."⁴ Some of them supply the oppressors with a philosophy. Marx quotes Reverend J. Townsend, who wrote in 1786 that hunger is the best motive to industry; that it is a wise law of nature that the poor are improvident, since want forces them to fulfill the servile and "ignoble" work of society, thereby relieving the "more delicate" from drudgery; and that the poor law merely tended to destroy the "harmony and beauty, the symmetry and order of that system which God and Nature have established in the world."⁵

In England the bourgeois spent in the nineteenth century great sums of money on "the evangelization of the lower orders," and, not content with the "native religious machinery," he imported from abroad organizers "of religion as a trade." The bourgeois

¹ Marx, *Capital*, vol. i, 15.

² *Ibid.*, p. 291 n.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 824-825; Engels, *Origin of the Family*, p. 181.

⁴ Marx, *Capital*, vol. i, 291 n.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 710.

knew well that religion was effective in befuddling the workers and in rendering them "submissive to the behests of the masters it had pleased God to place over them." Soon his confrères on the Continent became also convinced "that religion must be kept alive for the people," and this explains why the French and German bourgeoisie silently dropped their free-thought and suddenly became religious.¹ Religion represents the spiritual force of repression, just as the state represents the physical force.² It is the opiate that intoxicates the poor so as to render it easier to rob them. "The mortgage the peasant has on heavenly goods gives guaranty to the mortgage the bourgeois has on the peasant's earthly goods." The Church in France knew this well.³

But religion will not endure. The time will arrive when all phenomena under man's observation will become destitute of all mystery. Then the foundation of religion will be demolished. Under capitalism the range of mystery is narrowed to a considerable extent; yet the basic facts that give rise to religious reactions still persist. Crises, poverty, and the fetishism of commodities still rage at large, and they cannot be controlled. Man proposes, but the "coercive force" of capitalistic production disposes. However, capitalism will ultimately fall, and man's subjection to the secret forces concealed in the organization of his labor processes will vanish. He will study carefully, plan systematically, and regulate wisely the productive forces. He will at last become master of the mechanism he sets up, and every social phenomenon will be transparent to him and no longer a tantalizing riddle. Under socialism the state totters because of the obliteration of class distinctions; and religion is destroyed "owing to the simple fact that there is nothing more to reflect . . . religion dies a natural death."⁴

¹ Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, pp. xxv, xxxi, xxxvi.

² Marx, *Civil War in France*, p. 74.

³ Marx, *Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich*, p. 64.

⁴ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 257-258; Marx, *Capital*, vol. i, 91-92.

CHAPTER IX

THE ORIGIN AND NATURE OF SCIENCE

THE state, law, morality, and religion partake more of the nature of institutions than of ideologies, although the latter appellation is frequently applied to them by Marx and Engels. The ideologies proper are the reflections of these institutions and of the natural and social phenomena, formed in the brains of men. They are the ideas that people have of their environment, of the problems confronting them, and of the solutions to be adopted; they are theories and systems of thought formulated by the investigator; they are also the artistic reflections of reality. The ideologies proper may be taken as comprising natural and social science, philosophy, literature, and art.

The main source of science, natural or social, and the impelling force of its development are to be sought in the economic realm. The practical necessities and the intricate problems in direct and close or indirect and remote connection with the productive processes stir men to scientific thought and investigation. There are natural forces to subdue, methods of production to perfect, wayward human skill to replace by obedient mechanical contrivances. There are problems of class relations and class domination waiting for solution. The incentives that lead to study and search proceed primarily from self-interest. True, economists are concerned with rent as pure theory, and quite aside from the fact that, as spokesmen of the industrial capitalist, they are to wage battle against the landlord;¹ true, when humiliated by war, Germany devoted herself zealously and disinterestedly to the study of science and philosophy.² But Marx and Engels do not urge these cases as normal and typical. By and large, scientific study is promoted in order to meet practical needs and to derive tangible results. Marx and his friend do not find that idle curiosity has been the vivifying and driving motive of science heretofore.

¹ Marx, *Capital*, vol. iii, 908.

² Engels, *Feuerbach*, pp. 126-127.

The economic science that arose in the seventeenth century and received its positive formulation in the eighteenth, was "the expression of the condition and needs of the time," says Engels.¹ "Like all sciences, mathematics has sprung from the necessities of men, from the measurement of land and the content of vessels, from the calculation of time and mechanics."² The sporadic use of machinery in the seventeenth century supplied to great mathematicians a "practical basis and stimulant to the creation of the science of mechanics."³ In other words, material facts connected with the system of production create problems, pose questions, and encourage investigation. Egyptian astronomy owes its existence to "the necessity for predicting the rise and fall of the Nile," and explains as well the supremacy of priests as directors of agriculture.⁴ After 1825 all the new mechanical inventions in England were the outcome of workers' strikes, for the capitalist was intent on breaking the power that individual skill conferred upon the worker, and the new machines functioned as effective arms against labor that knew not to be meek.⁵ If civilization witnessed progressive achievements of science and at times great productions in art, it was "due only to the fact that without them the highest emoluments of modern wealth would have been missing."⁶

A correspondent writes to Engels that technique depends on science. Engels replies that, if this is so, science depends still more on the state and the requirements of technique. If society has a technical need, this will do more for the advancement of science than ten universities. All hydrostatics (Torricelli, etc.) had been born of the necessity to regulate the torrents in Italy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. We know, he continues, anything rational about electricity only since the day we discovered its technical use. Unfortunately the German is in the habit of writing the history of the sciences as if they had fallen down from the sky.⁷

¹ *Anti-Dühring*, p. 182.

² *Ibid.*, p. 60.

³ Marx, *Capital*, vol. i, 383.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 564 n.

⁵ Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*, pp. 153, 183.

⁶ Engels, *Origin of the Family*, pp. 215-216.

⁷ Letter of January 25, 1894, reprinted in M. Labriola's *Socialisme et philosophie*, pp. 258-259.

Human needs are the spur to scientific thought. That its content is firmly rooted in material actuality the philosophy of cognition and the dialectic, as was seen previously, emphatically testify. No ideas can be conceived in man's mind that have no basis in external materiality. The question is what relation science, once sprung into life, has to this reality. Here Engels distinguishes three groups of sciences: natural sciences, like mathematics, physics, chemistry, astronomy, concerned with inanimate natural phenomena; organic sciences, as biology, interested in animate nature; and social, or "historical sciences," dealing with social conditions surrounding human life, as law, political thought, philosophy, religion.

The first two groups of sciences are engaged with phenomena that are not man-made and that do not alter their nature. The recurrences of such phenomena and the sequences they display are always the same, and the laws governing them never change, despite the shifts in the modes of production in society. The blood circulation of an animal is not different under capitalism from what it was under the régime of ancient slavery. The behavior of acids and of parallel lines is the same in primitive communism and under feudalism. Atoms, heat, electricity, the movement of celestial bodies, obey constant laws that pay no homage to economic eras. These phenomena know no relativity. Nevertheless the two groups of sciences yield but a small crop of absolute, certain truths. The reason is that, while the phenomena themselves are not relative, the knowledge of them as acquired by man is.

The fundamental cause of this relativity is found in the powerlessness of the human mind to penetrate the ultimate character of natural phenomena and of the basic laws controlling them. Science advances step by step, ideas are subject to constant revision and correction, and conquests are enlarged and made secure only with great pain and haltingly. Boyle discovered that at the same temperature the volume of a gas varies inversely with the pressure on it. Then Regnault found that this law is susceptible to significant limitations; and further investigation may force on it more modifications. It took the long period from Galen to Malpighi to establish as simple a thing as the circulation of the

blood of mammals. Even in mathematics new hypotheses and new ways of looking at things are crowding one upon another; and frequent controversies arise concerning matters that were regarded as axiomatic, so that we are no longer certain of what exactly we are doing when we multiply and divide. Each generation boasts of its conquests, and new generations detract or enlarge. Each scientist is the product of the past heritage, but he is at the same time limited by it. We have few truths, and those already gained may be dethroned by future researches which will unlock new worlds and release new doubts. The field of absolute certainty even in these types of science is hardly extended far beyond the confines of such assertions as that two times two are four, birds have beaks, men must die. So speaks Engels.¹

It may be claimed that these sciences are relative also to the modes of production. But relativity will have a special sense here. It will mean that one productive era may stimulate the advancement of science more than another. Greek art and science would have been impossible without a régime of slavery;² feudalism fettered independent thought; "the whole Renaissance from the middle of the fifteenth century was an actual product of the city, and therefore of bourgeois domination";³ and socialism, we are assured, will offer the greatest opportunities for disinterested investigation in scientific fields of the widest scope.

It is different with the social sciences.⁴ Here the phenomena are man-made, and they exhibit different characteristics in each era of production. The very sequences of occurrences, the very raw material that is to be observed and studied before truths can be won, change from era to era. Each economic epoch engenders new phenomena, with different inherent laws governing them, for it has its own productive organization, classes, society, human nature, state, law, religion, and morality. It is true that natural phenomena are in a flux; but it is also true that the dialectic yields series of syntheses of the same basic character. The dialectic turns barley and grain into more barley and more grain,

¹ *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 120 ff., p. 104.

² *Ibid.*, p. 209.

³ Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 118.

⁴ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 122-123.

but not into different entities. In social history, however, the dialectic casts us into new realms with altered phenomena; from primitive communism it leads us through classical slavery, medieval feudalism, to modern capitalism, and ultimately to socialism.

Consequently, social sciences are relative not only as are the natural sciences because of the limitations of the human mind to master the hidden laws, but also with respect to each economic order. There is an abstract, absolute law of growth for plants; but, to use economics as an example, each mode of production has its own law of population.¹ "As soon as society has outlived a given period of development, and is passing over from one given stage to another, it begins to be subject also to other laws." This Marx quotes approvingly from the Russian reviewer of his *Capital*.² The genius of Aristotle saw that if two commodities exchanged for each other, there must have resided in them a common substance on the basis of which the two could be equated. But the reason he was unable to see that labor was precisely that common substance, and therefore could not arrive at a labor theory of value, was that the ancient mode of production was inadequate to provide such a law. The phenomena were lacking, and they appeared only centuries later under another mode of production. "The peculiar conditions of the society in which he lived alone prevented him from discovering what, 'in truth,' was at the bottom of this equality."³

The economic categories are transitory, and they change with each régime of production.⁴ In each era division of labor has a different character,⁵ property is differently developed and is linked with entirely different social relations.⁶ Rent does not appear at all prior to the capitalist mode of production, and Ricardo is in error when he thinks that rent accompanies landed property in any epoch.⁷ Rent proceeds not from land but from society.⁸ The same is true of all laws and principles in economics. "Political economy cannot be the same for all lands and for all

¹ Marx, *Capital*, vol. i, 693.

³ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

⁴ Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 119.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

⁸ *Capital*, vol. i, 95.

THE IDEOLOGICAL ELEMENT IN HISTORY

historical epochs," and almost all the laws of economics that we possess at present are laws that apply to the capitalist mode of production and to no other.¹

Philosophy is classed as an "historical," social science.² Like law, politics, and religion, it is a form in which the social consciousness expresses itself.³ Respecting its genesis and connection with the economic world, it occupies the same position as religion. It is furthest removed from the economic basis because of the presence of many intervening links;⁴ and it did not originate in response to economic needs, as the other sciences did. It arose in prehistoric times, and was filled with an absurd content, because, economic development being then at a rudimentary stage, men could not help generating erroneous ideas of man and nature. The history of natural science is the history of the gradual destruction of these prehistoric, barbaric absurdities, or of their constant replacement by lesser absurdities. Each newly born economic epoch finds an aggregate of philosophical ideas that have come down from the preceding one, and employs them as a starting point. This circumstance explains why countries economically backward may be far advanced in philosophical speculation.

But in spite of all, even in philosophy the potency of economic forces is manifest. Only their influence is frequently indirect, and for the following reason. The raw material that gives rise to philosophical reflection is frequently, not economic reality immediately, but the ideologies that had issued from this reality, namely, politics, law, morality. The economic elements do not create directly anything in philosophy; they act first on these ideologies, and through them determine the variations in the philosophical heritage bequeathed to a given era.⁵

It follows that philosophical speculation is not only relative in the same sense that all social sciences are, but is in its develop-

¹ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 176, 180.

² *Ibid.*, p. 122.

³ Marx, *Critique of Political Economy*, p. 12.

⁴ Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 117.

⁵ Engels, letter of October 27, 1890, reprinted in A. Labriola's *Socialisme et philosophie*, pp. 254-256.

ment also contingent upon the stage of progress of these sciences. Further, philosophy is dependent a good deal on natural science, thus providing an example of how all sciences are intertwined. The Greek philosophy of the world was naïve: it was the "primitive naturalistic materialism." But it could not be otherwise, since all branches of science were in their initial stages.¹ Exact observation of nature began in the Alexandrian period, and experienced further development at the hands of the Arabs in the Middle Ages. However, true natural science began to flourish in the middle of the fifteenth century, and the new points of view it had won were subsequently carried by Bacon and Locke into philosophy.² Eighteenth-century materialism and metaphysics were mechanical and static in their fundamental postulates, because natural science had the mechanical and non-evolutionary viewpoint. Since then the philosophy of materialism underwent significant mutations collateral "with each epoch-making discovery in the department of natural science."³ Hegel had ideas of change and progress; yet, although "next to Saint-Simon, . . . the most universal intellect of his time," he could not detect the laws of the development-process because, among other things, of the limitations of contemporary knowledge.⁴ In the nineteenth century science devoted the most vigilant attention to the processes of transmutation and growth of objects, and undertook a vigorous study of the principles underlying these processes. Physiology, embryology, and geology are examples. Then came the three great discoveries: the cell as the unit of plant and animal life, the transformation of energy, and Darwin's theory of evolution.⁵ Consequently, philosophy accepted soon a broader materialism, which embraced these "more recent discoveries of natural science."⁶ The proof of the materialistic dialectic was found in nature, and science deserves much credit for having accumulated the data for the argument.⁷

Like institutions, science and philosophy have repercussions on the economic world. In this respect, a distinction is to be made

¹ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 40-41, 170.

² *Ibid.*, p. 42.

³ Engels, *Feuerbach*, pp. 65, 67, 98.

⁴ *Anti-Dühring*, p. 45.

⁵ *Feuerbach*, pp. 99-101.

⁶ *Anti-Dühring*, p. 46.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 32, 44.

between natural and social sciences. Natural science, as was seen earlier, is prominent in the formation of the mode of production, and is identified with the productive forces. Accordingly it serves, indirectly and through the system of production, as a regulator of human history. It also plays its part in liberating man from the blind, inexorable domination of nature, and in elevating him from the domain of necessity to the realm of freedom, by strengthening him with the knowledge of the laws governing his natural environment.¹ In its future progress science will tear the mask off many a mystery and will at last dispel the conception of any "antagonism between spirit and matter, man and nature, soul and body."²

Social science, on the other hand, is not as potent and as active a factor in history. But neither is it entirely a passive element. It sheds a glamour over men's achievements, lends color to historical periods, marks turning points in human events, and helps in breaking the ground for great movements. The brilliant school of French materialists "made the eighteenth century, in spite of all battles on land and sea won over Frenchmen by Germans and Englishmen, a preëminently French century, even before that crowning French Revolution."³ The scientific discovery that products, as values, are the expression of human labor embodied in them marks "an epoch in the history of the development of the human race."⁴ The French philosophy supplied the principles and battle cries, the "theoretical flag," of the French Revolution, and prepared men's minds for it.⁵ "Just as in France in the eighteenth, so in Germany in the nineteenth century, revolutionary philosophic conceptions introduced a breaking-up of existing political conditions."⁶ "The German working-class movement is the heir of the German classical philosophy," and modern socialism, in its theoretical aspects, has its roots in the teachings of the French philosophers of the eighteenth century.⁷

¹ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 148.

² *Neue Zeit*, vol. xiv, no. 2 (1895-1896), pp. 552-553.

³ *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. xiii.

⁴ Marx, *Capital*, vol. i, 85.

⁵ Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, pp. xxvi, 1-2.

⁶ Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 37.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 128; *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. 1.

But once more, it should not be forgotten that whatever influence ideology exerts on human history, it ever remains the product of economic forces. In the last instance, the economic forces assert their sway, and drag in their train all other phases of social life, notwithstanding retardations and slight modifications imposed by institutions and systems of thought. Whatever concessions are made at times, this is the position from which neither Marx nor Engels ever swerves. The economic reality is primary and decisive.¹ The more, Engels teaches, a given sphere is removed from the economic province, and the more it approaches abstract ideology, the more zigzags its curve of development will display. But the longer the period under observation and the larger the domain under study, the more will the curve tend to be parallel to the curve of economic development.²

Philosophy is the ideology remotest from the economic basis, but it is no exception. "In spite of all," he contends, "they [the philosophers] themselves are under the dominant influence of economic evolution." Hobbes, the first modern materialist, was a partisan of absolutism; Locke was in religion and politics the son of the compromise of 1688. The English deists and their successors, the French materialists, were the philosophers of the bourgeoisie; and the materialism of the latter "was nothing more than the idealized kingdom of the bourgeoisie." They "could, no more than their predecessors, go beyond the limits imposed upon them by their epoch."³ The post-Renaissance philosophy, the

¹ Concerning the whole range of social sciences the *Communist Manifesto* (p. 39) expresses itself as follows:

"Does it require deep intuition to comprehend that man's ideas, views, and conceptions, in one word, man's consciousness, changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations and in his social life?"

"What else does the history of ideas prove than that intellectual production changes in character in proportion as material production is changed? The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class.

"When people speak of ideas that revolutionize society, they do but express the fact that within the old society the elements of a new one have been created, and that the dissolution of the old ideas keeps even pace with the dissolution of the old conditions of existence."

² Engels, letter cited above, p. 261.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 254-255; *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, pp. 2-4; *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 36-37.

English and French philosophy of the eighteenth century, and the Hegelian school were "only the philosophical expression of the thoughts corresponding with the development of the small and middle bourgeois into the great bourgeois." The small German bourgeois runs through the German philosophy from Kant to Hegel, now positively, now negatively. The philosophers from Descartes to Hegel, and from Hobbes to Feuerbach, were by "no means" guided solely by the force of pure reason. "On the contrary, what really impelled them was, in particular, the strong and ever quicker conquering step of natural science and industry."¹

What destinies Marx and Engels would prescribe for the various sciences when socialism comes is, one may believe, not difficult to deduce. Natural science will flourish luxuriantly under the sway of investigation unmarred and unenthralled by the interests of the bourgeoisie. Men of science will no longer be the "paid wage laborers" doing the bidding of the capitalists, but will dedicate themselves to the unhampered study of the ways of nature in order to promote man's speedy ascent to freedom. The fate of the social sciences will not be so cheerful. Some of them will receive their death warrant. All theorizing concerning the state will most probably vanish, for socialism will know no state or property; the study of religion will be abandoned, as there will remain no mysteries to harass the human mind. The socialist realm will be devoid of such phenomena, and the corresponding sciences will have nothing to observe and to "reflect." Such sciences as economics, psychology, and ethics will undoubtedly prosper, since economic activities will expand in scope, human beings will find fullest self-expression, and morality will move on a superior plane.

Philosophy, however, is doomed to a bitter end. Its task has been heretofore to "devise" interrelations among the phenomena of nature or society, and to indicate how facts fit into the great scheme of the totality of things. But with the powerful advance of future science, these interconnections will be sought rather in the phenomena themselves, and not in the "empty imaginings"

¹ Engels, *Feuerbach*, pp. 118, 62; letter cited above, p. 255.

of the philosopher's mind. Each science will be in a position to discover the interdependence of the particular phenomena falling within the confines of its own study, and also their affinity to phenomena under scrutiny in all the other sciences. Recourse will be had directly to external facts and not to internal speculation. Positive science will reign everywhere. Philosophy had rendered great service in its day. But it is no longer needed. In its stead the laws of thought will come to power — logic and especially dialectics. Philosophy will be discarded, and the dialectic will ascend the throne.¹

Of art and literature we find no discussion except a few notes sketched by Marx.² It appears, he says, that periods of the highest development of art stand in no direct and close association with the general development of the community or with its material basis and structure. Examples are ordinarily drawn in support of this view from the Greeks or the Elizabethans, comparing their attainments with those of modern days, when the economic development reached a higher scale. But appearances deceive, suggests Marx, and the connection is there nevertheless. Greek art sprang from the soil of its mythology, and it would have been utterly impossible without a mythology. Now mythology thrives when the forces of nature are an enigma to man. He then shapes them and dominates them in and through imagination. Nature, and even forms of society, are molded "in popular fancy in an unconsciously artistic fashion." Greek art employed Greek mythology as its raw material, and such art could not originate in a society which excludes mythological conceptions of nature. Such art can appear, then, only under "unripe social conditions."

As soon as man gains mastery over his natural environment, mythology disappears, and consequently art like that of the Greeks is nonexistent. In an age of automatic machinery, railways, locomotives, and the electric telegraph such views of nature

¹ Engels, *Feuerbach*, pp. 101, 125, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 57; *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. 39.

² Marx, *Critique of Political Economy*, appendix, pp. 309-312.

and social relations as had been formed by Greek imagination and Greek art are inconceivable.

Where does Vulcan come in as against Roberts and Company; Jupiter, as against the lightning rod; and Hermes as against the Credit Mobilier? . . . What becomes of the Goddess of Fame side by side with Printing House Square? . . . Is Achilles possible side by side with powder and lead? Or is the Iliad at all compatible with the printing press and the steam press? Do not singing and reciting and the muses necessarily go out of existence with the appearance of the printer's bar, and do not, therefore, disappear the prerequisites of epic poetry?

"But," continues Marx, "the difficulty is not in grasping the idea that Greek art and epos are bound up with certain forms of social development." It consists rather in the question why they still furnish us esthetic enjoyment and even serve as standards "beyond attainment." Marx has an explanation. A man cannot become a child, yet he enjoys the artless ways of the child and strives to reproduce its truth "on a higher plane." Similarly, the social childhood of mankind holds forth the charm of an age that will never return. The Greeks were normal children, and they exhibited "the most beautiful development" of the social childhood. Therefore their art has an irresistible charm for us.

Here the manuscript ends. Engels's discussions and Marx's manuscripts more than once break off exactly at the point where the pivotal difficulties begin.

PART IV
THE TREND OF HISTORY

CHAPTER X

MARX'S CONCEPT OF CAPITALISM

THE materialistic interpretation of history is a manner of viewing human events. It is a philosophy of history, a contribution to thought. However, Marx did not have in mind merely to present to scholars a method of illuminating the paths of social progress. The materialistic conception has a practical mission. Marx and his friend were propagandists, and their theory is of great service to them. It is the instrument with which they demolish the old, utopian socialism, and by means of which they erect a new structure. Socialism and the socialist movement are taken out of the realm of aspiration and fond hopes; socialistic society becomes the definite and inevitable goal toward which the historical processes move with irresistible force. Marx founded the so-called "scientific socialism," and he employed the materialistic interpretation as the cornerstone.

All the theories sponsored by their predecessors for the regeneration of society they scorn as utopian. Ever since the appearance of capitalism and the hosts of evils it let loose on society there has been, they say, no want of well-meaning persons who sedulously sought to build a better order. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries people who were filled with aversion to the iniquitous world about them painted beautiful pictures of conditions in utopian climes. In the following century Morelly and Mably propounded schemes calling for the obliteration of class distinctions, demanded political and social equality, and proposed austere Spartan communism as a substitute for immoral capitalism. Then came Sismondi with his cry, "Back to medievalism"; then "the three great utopians," Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Owen.¹

The theories of all these social reformers Marx and Engels denounce as fantastic visions. The utopians all lived and thought

¹ Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, pp. 5-6; *Communist Manifesto*, p. 46.

at a time when capitalism was young, when its productive forces were not fully developed, when the proletarian class had barely begun to assume form, and when the class struggle was only sporadic and devoid of a definite aim and a well-founded philosophy. They were keenly alive to the evils of the societies in which they lived; to privilege, oppression, glaring inequalities, and moral decadence. And they denounced them with great fervor. But aside from criticism, they were impotent. Reality could not as yet, through an exhibition of its inner mechanism, hint as to the nature and course of the malevolent forces at work; and so could not disclose the fundamental cause of the disease and point to a practical and abiding cure. The only way left to them was to seek final solutions in their own minds. They took to speculations, prepared nostrums with extreme care, and planned new and better social régimes with much foresight and earnestness. Each one improvised schemes and proclaimed doctrines that suited his temper and his personal environment.

But, Marx and Engels continue, these constructions were inconsistent with the requirements of reality. The proffered solutions did not emanate from social conditions as a source, for the promulgators were unable to find adequate material in existing circumstances. Inadequate diagnosis led to prescriptions at once bizarre and futile. Crude realities grew a crop of crude theories. These dreamers proceeded on the false assumption that the sense of justice and morality was so firmly embedded in human nature that a mere appeal to these feelings would yield miraculous results. The tenets of justice had only to be proclaimed, iniquities unveiled and decried, and society would proceed in all haste to rebuild the world. They did not claim to be the spokesmen of an oppressed class; they rather posed as the well-wishers and emancipators of all mankind, and as the shapers of a world that would be a happier place for everybody. Obsessed by a fanatic faith, they undertook the task of harmonizing the interests of antagonistic classes and of conciliating elements that could not be conciliated. They relied on admonition and exhortation and on petty experiments that would set a good example.

To them social science was a catalogue of ready-made formulas

yielding immediately the solution to all problems; it was not an elucidation of the material facts of the outside world and an explanation of how the dialectic movement itself prepares the forces that will culminate in the inevitable solution. Reality was inadequate as a guide, and what there was of it was not accepted as the teacher. In poverty they saw only poverty, and in social distress they did not detect "the revolutionary subversive side which will overturn the old society." Their remodeling schemes called for no fundamental change of the material basis of society and for no extirpation of the very forces that engendered the evils. They planned to engraft on the material conditions of the existing order the results of their idealistic weavings. They dreamed of adorning the lion with the lamb's skin.¹

To these fantastic constructions Marx called a halt. His theory of social development demonstrated that history was the history of class struggles, and that classes were a product of the modes of production. "From that time forward," says Engels, "socialism was no longer an accidental discovery of this or that ingenious brain, but the necessary outcome of the struggle" between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. The task became no longer one of inventing a perfect system, but one of examining the "historico-economic succession of events" that produce the class struggle, and of discovering the material facts destined to serve as a means of ending the conflict.² It was essential to indicate that the capitalist system, while unavoidable, was heading toward an inevitable downfall; and it was sufficient to reveal how the innermost workings of the present order condemn it to this fate. The materialistic interpretation of social life accomplished the one task, and the "discovery" of surplus value performed the other. "These two great discoveries," Engels assures us, ". . . we owe to Marx. With these discoveries socialism became a science."³ They proclaimed Marx the founder of scientific socialism.

The first discovery, the materialistic view of history, is not elucidated in one particular work; it is presented in numerous

¹ Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*, pp. 136-137, 197, *Communist Manifesto*, pp. 53-54; Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, pp. 6, 11-27.

² *Ibid.*, p. 42.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

statements scattered in his various writings. But the second "discovery," which unlocks the secret mechanism of the present system and throws into relief the ominous forces that operate remorselessly for its dissolution, claimed his attention for a good number of years. On it he spent the best of his labors, and he made it the central theme of his crowning work, the three volumes of *Capital*.

These two discoveries are not isolated achievements; they are closely allied with each other. The materialistic philosophy specifies that no economic order is eternal, that it has to cede its place to a successor, that capitalism is not immune from this fate, and that socialism will triumph on its ruins. It appeared to Marx essential to show conclusively that such is the inexorable course of history. His task was, therefore, to disclose the hidden mechanism of the present régime, to reveal the contradictions it nourishes, and to point to the germs of the future socialistic order that have already come into life. He had to explain the thesis and the swarm of antitheses engendered in it, and to foretell accurately what the coming synthesis would be. This, his friends hold, he accomplished in his masterpiece. In a larger sense, therefore, we may regard *Capital* as a part of his interpretation of history and as an intensive elaboration and application of one of its momentous claims. Marx did not aim to present in *Capital* merely a learned treatise on political economy.

Such a view comes reluctantly to the reader's mind. *Capital* is a comprehensive work, and we are accustomed to regard it as a complete and independent body of thought, privileged, like the tub, to stand on its own bottom. Yet, the more one reflects upon Marx's works and ideas, the more one wonders whether they do not constitute one system with the materialistic interpretation of history as its core and with *Capital* as an intensive elaboration and verification of one of the phases of that interpretation. There are two possible views. Marx was interested in the past, present, and future of the destinies of mankind. To pierce into the future, he had to study the present and see what it augurs. Hence *Capital*. Or else, he believed *a priori*, and from the materialistic standpoint, that the socialist spectre was at the door of capital-

MARX'S CONCEPT OF CAPITALISM

ism; but he desired to lend to this belief or teaching the dignity of objective and scientific truth, and accordingly he amassed an arsenal of economic learning proving conclusively and specifically that the stars in their courses are fighting for socialism. In either view, his conception of history may be taken as the dominant theory and *Capital* as subservient to it.

In the preface to the *Critique of Political Economy*, a work published in 1859, Marx explains that philosophical questions involved in the policies of the French socialists had led him to a critical revision of Hegel's *Philosophy of Law*, and that these studies had brought him to the conviction embodied in the materialistic view of historical development. After these studies he turned to economics, and he confesses that the materialistic conception of history "continued to serve as the leading thread" in this new pursuit.¹ Now why should an author of a book on economics preface it with an account of his philosophico-evolutionary credo respecting world history, and why should his theory of history serve as a guiding principle in his economic researches?

In the preface to *Capital* he declares that his ultimate aim is "to lay bare the economic law of motion of modern society" and to study its "natural laws," or the "tendencies working with iron necessity towards inevitable results."² The movement of capitalism toward something else is uppermost in his mind. Again, in the first paragraph of the first volume of the same work he announces: "Our investigation must therefore begin with the analysis of a commodity," the economic cell form of modern production.³ But what purpose is lurking in his mind is shown on the last page of the chapter before the last.⁴ There we read: "The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated. . . . But capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a law of nature, its own negation," and the outcome is "coöperation and the possession in common of the land

¹ *Critique of Political Economy*, pp. 10-11.

² *Capital*, vol. i, 13, 14.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 837. It is really the last page of the last chapter, since the following chapter on "the modern theory of colonization" may be regarded as an appendix, or as a reversion to a thesis maintained in an earlier chapter.

and of the means of production. . . . What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own gravediggers." He begins with the analysis of commodities, which, in his opinion, are the smallest elements within the capitalist order; reveals the secrets of its workings; outlines its origin; shows how the dialectic labors for its extinction; and finally reads its death warrant. It is evident that the ghost of his interpretation of history stalks through the pages of *Capital*.

Marx hardly approached the study of the present régime in a spirit of utter detachment and without preconceived notions. He knew beforehand the answer he wanted. The materialistic philosophy was in his mind, and *Capital* had to conform to this conception. Had Marx by 1847 done any work on his *Capital*? No. Yet in the *Communist Manifesto* he and his friend announced all the important conclusions which twenty years later appeared in *Capital* as the fresh results of the learned investigations, cumbersome discussions, and intricate reasoning, laboriously presented on its pages.

We shall therefore have to examine Marx's views on the nature of capitalist society and its fate as presented in this work. Our findings will throw light on his theory of history. The characteristics of an economic epoch and the principles governing it, the fatal agencies silently undermining it, the interests animating the contending classes, the nature of the class struggle, the transition to a new order — all these take on concrete forms in *Capital*. Incidentally, we shall discover the rock on which he demolishes utopian and erects his scientific socialism. *Capital* has not in vain become the Bible of the proletariat.

The first question is: what is capitalism? One should think that a writer who spends a lifetime in analyzing capitalism, in disclosing and attacking its weaknesses, and in pronouncing its doom, would take the pains to provide a clear idea of exactly what the subject of his attention is. But this he does not do. We know that with Marx capitalism is a transient era, an historical incident, although a significant one, that vanishes when its hour has struck. To the economist, capitalism is not a modern phe-

nomenon, but rather a manner of producing goods that has been pursued from time immemorial, because capital, or man-made instruments of production, have played a considerable part since early ages. This is anathema to Marx.¹ He attacks the economists for regarding capitalism and capitalist relations as immutable and as governed by natural laws that are not subject to the influence of time.² “. . . Scientific analysis,” he claims, demonstrates that this order is dependent upon, and is defined by, peculiar historical conditions. It has a “specific, historical, passing character.”³ But what is capitalism?

The upholders of the technological interpretation of Marx's idea relative to the mode of production will answer readily that with him capitalism is the historical epoch wherein the process of making goods is characterized by the pervasive use of machinery. But we must remind ourselves that, according to him, capitalism arrived in the sixteenth century, whereas machinery came into general use only after the Industrial Revolution, toward the end of the eighteenth. Capitalism went through the stages of “coöperation” and “manufacture” before “modern industry,” with its machine technique, appeared. It flourished over two centuries before machinery was known.

Some may urge that the characteristic mark of capitalism is the production of commodities, as Marx uses the term: he distinguishes between a product, which is an article made expressly for use by the producer himself, and a commodity, which is an article produced solely as merchandise, not for consumption but for exchange, for sale on the market. Marx himself sometimes gives countenance to such a view of capitalism. He says that “The mode of production in which the product takes the form of a commodity, or is produced directly for exchange, is the most general and most embryonic form of bourgeois production. . . .”⁴ “The monetary system correctly proclaims production for the world market and the transformation of the product into commodities . . . as the prerequisite and condition of capitalist production.”⁵

¹ *Critique of Political Economy*, pp. 269-270.

² *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 131.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. i, 94.

³ *Capital*, vol. iii, 1023-1024.

⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 911.

Yet this helps us little in distinguishing this system from others, in the Marxian scheme. True, capitalism produces commodities, but it cannot be affirmed that any mode of production which produces commodities Marx will stamp as capitalistic. All horses are animals, but not all animals are horses. There have been other régimes where production was for sale and profit. There was exchange of commodities on the boundaries of contiguous communities even in the days of primitive communism.¹ Marx and Engels relate, as was seen in chapter four, that commerce had flourished, money had circulated, usurers had plied their trade, merchants had thrived for ages before Christ — in Phoenicia and Carthage, in Greece and Rome. Bankers and credit associations were known in the Middle Ages. All these agencies and institutions imply exchange of commodities. Where articles are produced for the use of the direct producer, there is no exchange. “Merchant’s capital is older than the capitalist mode of production . . . and its function consists exclusively in promoting the exchange of commodities.”² Engels declares that the advent of private property in Greece led to trade and to “a transformation of products into commodities”; that toward the end of the higher stage of barbarism “production of commodities and the resulting trade had well advanced”; and that at the dawn of civilization, when man had emancipated himself from barbarism, we find commodity production, interest, usury, the merchant and the middleman.³ Of course, the production of commodities permeates society more at present than in the past, but this fact points to a difference in degree and not in kind.

Others will argue with confidence that, according to Marx, the heart of capitalism is surplus value. This view will appear plausible because of the sanction it receives from Engels himself who pronounces surplus value to be the secret of capitalism, and who lauds Marx for the discovery of the secret.⁴ Surplus value is linked in our minds with capitalism also because of the extended

¹ *Capital*, vol. iii, 209; vol. i, 100.

² *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 382, 385.

³ Engels, *Origin of the Family*, pp. 131, 135, 200, 214; *Anti-Dühring*, p. 189. Cf. *Capital*, vol. iii, 382-383.

⁴ Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. 44.

exposition of it supplied by Marx in connection with his onslaughts against the present system. Moreover, Marx himself at times employs expressions that encourage such a view. He makes statements like the following: "production of surplus value is the absolute law of this [capitalistic] mode of production";¹ "surplus value presupposes capitalistic production";² "capitalist production is not merely the production of commodities, it is essentially the production of surplus value";³ "the other specific mark of the capitalist mode of production is the production of surplus value as the direct aim and determining incentive of production."⁴

But this is neither convincing nor conclusive. That, with Marx, the production of surplus value is a mark of capitalism no one will dispute. The question is rather this: is it clear from all Marxian writings that the emerging of surplus value is a peculiar feature that distinguishes it from any other mode of production? does he mean to assert that capitalism is the only system that produces surplus value, and is, therefore, any system producing surplus value to be taken as a capitalistic system? To this the answer must be no. It is clear at once that surplus product and surplus labor go together. A man works for a master and obtains for his labor a part of the product which will suffice for his maintenance; the remainder is appropriated by the master as surplus product; and the labor expended on this surplus product is surplus labor. Now with respect to the relation of surplus labor to surplus value, two courses may be followed.

As will be seen later, one sense in which Marx uses value is that it presents congealed labor embodied in a commodity. Surplus labor, then, is surplus value. "It is every bit as important, for a correct understanding of surplus value, to conceive it as a mere congelation of surplus labor-time," insists Marx. Consequently, it is sufficient to point out that surplus labor existed before capitalism in order to see that surplus value existed under other modes of production. That such was the case is obvious. He continues: "The essential difference between the various economic forms of

¹ Marx, *Capital*, vol. i, 678.

² *Ibid.*, p. 784.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 558.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 1026.

society . . . lies only in the mode in which this surplus labor is in each case extracted from the actual producer, the laborer.”¹ “Capital has not invented surplus labor,” he asserts; for whenever some members of society are in the possession of the means of production, the laborer employing the means, after having worked enough to provide his own subsistence, is compelled to work for some additional hours in order to provide for the proprietor, “whether this proprietor be the Athenian *καλὸς κάγαθός*, Etruscan theocrat, civis Romanus, Norman baron, American slave-owner, Wallachian Boyard, modern landlord or capitalist.”² Surplus labor prevailed under other régimes, therefore surplus value prevailed also.

But it may be insisted that Marx uses value in the other sense, too, namely, as exchange value and not as intrinsic value, when he talks of surplus value. If so, we have merely to recall that, according to Marx, commerce has existed since classical antiquity: commerce implies the exchange of the surplus product, that is, the transformation of the results of surplus labor into surplus value. The slave master in Greece, the feudal lord, and the capitalist employer allow labor to use the means of production, turn to the laborer a portion of the resulting product for his subsistence, but appropriate the rest and exchange it. What else could be the source of commerce and usury under ancient slavery and in the feudal Middle Ages? Those three régimes all had surplus value, the first two as well as the third.³ Marx himself admits that labor value prevailed since the days of tribal communism, furnishing an admirable illustration of his pure labor theory of value.⁴ There had been, therefore, surplus labor, exchange, and surplus value before the coming of capitalism.

Or, to approach it from another angle, we know that, according to Marx, the Greek usurer and merchant gained interest and profit, and the medieval lord extorted services from the serf which are termed rent. These returns are surplus value. Surplus value

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 241.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 259-260. Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 561, 591; vol. iii, p. 953; *Value, Price and Profits*, pp. 83-84.

³ *Capital*, vol. iii, 383-384.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

embodies all shares of distribution exclusive of wages turned over to the direct producers, the laborers; it includes, then, interest, rent, profits, and such incidental shares as tithes and taxes.¹ Marx teaches that "merchant's profits" form one of the elements of surplus value.² He says the same of the usurer. The merchant and the usurer have been familiar figures since the days of Greece. When discussing ruthless exploitation by the usurer, he points out that usury in the past devoured at times the whole surplus labor, and "hence it is very absurd to compare the level of this interest, which assimilates all surplus value," with the modern rate of interest, which assimilates but part of it.³ It is no different in respect of "ground rent" in the Middle Ages. The serf works a number of days each week on the estate of the feudal lord, but receives no compensation — the appropriation of surplus labor is candid and ostensible. Here "rent and surplus value are identical," comments Marx; here "surplus value obviously has the form of surplus labor . . . the identity of surplus value with unpaid labor of others does not need to be demonstrated by any analysis in this case, because it still exists in its visible, palpable form," while under capitalism it is concealed.⁴ Ancient slavery and medieval serfdom knew of surplus value. Surplus value cannot, therefore, be the specific, distinguishing earmark of capitalism.

Marx does not tell what the peculiar criteria of capitalism are. Yet, when we survey the various modes of production and seek those attributes of capitalism which are not to be discerned in the other orders, we find that there is a distinctive feature. It lies in the form and nature of labor. Under capitalism labor is "free labor," in other systems it is not. In the days of classical antiquity the slave was not free to move about and to offer his labor on the market, for he was bodily owned by his master. Under the feudal régime the serf was attached to the soil; there was one master to whom he was constrained to render services; he had no freedom in exercising his capacity to labor. The journeyman was likewise bound hand and foot by guild restrictions.

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 244; also p. 229 n., p. 648 n., p. 585; vol. iii, *passim*.

² *Ibid.*, vol. i, 618-619. ³ *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 699. ⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 917, 919-920.

Under capitalism the laborer is "free," and in two senses. In the first place, he is personally independent, he is not owned by anybody, and no one has any claim on his person; he is at liberty to dispose of himself and of his labor in any way he sees fit, and to contract with anyone he pleases. Coöperation is common to all modes of production, observes Marx, but under capitalism it is distinguished by free labor: "The capitalist form, on the contrary, presupposes from first to last the free wage laborer who sells his labor power to capital."¹ In the second place, the laborer is free from the possession of any means and appliances that are prerequisite in the processes of modern production. He is unencumbered with any property essential in production, except one, his personal power to work. He is, accordingly, in no position to function as an independent producer of articles, since production requires the service of tools, raw materials, buildings, outlays — and these he does not own. He must resort to those members of society who do own the indispensable requisites of production, and offer them his labor power for sale. Under the previous systems only the products partook of the nature of commodities, that is, merchandise. Under capitalism a new commodity, a new merchandise appears on the market — labor power.² "The whole system of capitalist production is based on the fact that the workman sells his labor power as a commodity,"³ and "the form of labor, as wage-labor, determines the shape of the entire process and the specific mode of production itself."⁴

Here is the fundamental condition, the basic fact of capitalism. Two peculiar commodity possessors confront each other in the market: "on the one side, the possessor of the means of production and subsistence, on the other, the possessor of nothing but labor power." The "polarization of the market" with these two commodities is the rock on which capitalism is built, the source from which emanate the two chief classes that constitute the framework of modern social structure.⁵ It is the fountain-head

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 367; Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 142.

² *Capital*, vol. i, 187-188.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 470.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 1028. Cf. *Ibid.*, vol. i, 189 n., pp. 624-625.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 624, 785.

of all contradictions and troubles. That one part of society should find itself in possession of all the means of production, while the larger portion is thoroughly destitute of them, is not the inevitable resultant of the workings of nature. It is a social product. "It is clearly the result of a past historical development, the product of many economic revolutions."¹

Intimately connected with the idea of "free labor," never clearly formulated by Marx but unmistakably dwelling in his mind, is another distinguishing trait of capitalism. While free otherwise, labor is directly and explicitly subjected to objective economic forces inherent in the very nature of this system of production. Under this régime the exigencies of the productive process force the laborer into his niche, place him in a given status, and brand him with the stamp of peculiar dependence. The slave was a slave because of ancient laws and institutions. True, these laws and institutions were, according to Marx, no independent phenomena, — on the contrary, they evolved because of economic forces; but once evolved, *they* were the ones that kept the slave in his place. A slave set free would not have been pushed back into slavery by the impact of economic elements. He could become an independent producer, an artisan, for example. The mode of production was so elementary, and it was so lenient in its requirements, that a freed slave could in time procure the amount of property indispensable for independent production. The situation in the Middle Ages was similar. A serf, once freed, would not have been driven by the economic currents back to the lord's manor. He could become an independent craftsman. Such was the case with the freed Roman slave, with the liberated serf. Once released from the clutches of the institution or laws, he found in the hostility of economic elements no insurmountable obstacle to independence.

Not so under capitalism. Production is more complex. It calls for elaborate division and coöperation of labor and its massing and coördination under one roof; it requires large quantities of tools, machinery, raw materials; it demands acquaintance with far-away markets, with complicated methods of financing, with

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 188.

supervision, generalship, and the maintenance of discipline. Enmeshed within such a mechanism, a mere cog in the wheel, the individual laborer is not in a position to exercise his own judgment when at work, for the intelligence is dissociated from him and is concentrated in the capitalist. What outlet is there for the "free" worker? He cannot hope to amass the vast stores of materials, appliances, buildings, and experience. They are too numerous and too costly. He cannot conjure up, out of his own self, a body of laborers arrayed in a scheme of division and coöperation.

Thus even in the early phase of capitalism, namely, "manufacture" or the handicraft system, the laborer faces such impediments. "It is a result of the division of labor in manufactures that the laborer is brought face to face with the intellectual potencies of the material process of production as the property of another and as a ruling power."¹ Unfitted to produce anything independently, he must become an appendage of the workshop. It is worse under the later phase of the modern régime. The worker is free so far as laws and institutions are concerned, but the all-pervasive organization of factory production presents an insuperable barrier to independence. He has to join the army, submit himself to the discipline imposed by the captains, take his place in the barrack, and obey orders. Objective capitalism, or rather capital, subjects the laborer. Willingly he has to acknowledge its supremacy and relinquish to it his independence. "In the ordinary run of things," Marx comments, "the laborer can be left to the 'natural laws of production,' that is, to his dependence on capital, a dependence springing from, and guaranteed in perpetuity by, the conditions of production themselves."² The capitalist who rules him is merely the personification of capital, the wielder of the power capital had conferred on him.³ This idea is expressed in Marx unsatisfactorily: in some connections he barely hints at it,⁴ in other places he is somewhat more explicit.⁵

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 396-397. ² *Ibid.*, p. 809; Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 178.

³ "Except as personified capital, the capitalist has no historical value." *Capital*, vol. i, 648. "The capitalist is merely capital personified and functions in the process of production as the agent of capital." *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 953.

⁴ *Capital*, vol. iii, 699; vol. i, 559.

⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. i, 396-397, 625, 675 (quoting Eden), 840, 843.

Reverting to the alleged earmarks of capitalism, that is, commodity production and surplus value, it is to be pointed out that even where Marx brings them forward as the distinguishing features of the present system, he has in mind mainly "free labor" and its subjection to impersonal capital. This can be seen in the last pages¹ of *Capital* where he touches upon the "two peculiar traits" of the modern order. One of these is that it produces commodities, that is, goods for sale and profit and not for use by the producer himself. But he adds that this trait does not distinguish capitalism from other systems. What is peculiar to capitalism is the fact that labor itself becomes a commodity. The second trait, he says, is that the modern régime produces surplus value. He points out that this implies the direct authority of capital over labor by virtue of its economic strength and not by dint of legal prowess. "This authority is vested in its bearers only as a personification of the requirements of labor standing above the laborer. It is not vested in them in their capacity as political or theoretical rulers, in the way that it used to be under former modes of production."

Labor, free legally but implicitly subordinated to the economic elements involved in production, is the specifically distinguishing criterion of capitalism. But as a concept, as an economic system, capitalism is vastly more comprehensive. It stands for an ensemble of many elements: private property, freedom and obligations of contract, the production for exchange and not for use, the capitalist owner of the means of production, the laborer directly subjugated by the requirements of the work process but "free" otherwise, the relations of the capitalist and proletarian classes, the prominence of industrial over mercantile and usurer's capital, the annexation of surplus value and the re-creation of capital from it, the workshop in the early phase of capitalism and the machine in the later phase, prevalence of division of labor, marketing and financing operations on an elaborate scale, large-scale production, amassing of great fortunes in spectacular ways, and so on.

¹ Vol. iii, 1025-1027.

CHAPTER XI

THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF CAPITALISM

FOR a proper understanding of the innermost nature of capitalist society and of the inevitable tendencies it harbors, we have to turn to Marx's analysis of value. In his scheme, the law of value prevailing in the present order reveals the mainspring of all the evils and the fatal inconsistencies with which the system is cursed. This theory brings us in full view of the nursery of all the villains in the drama.

Capitalist production yields commodities that are exchanged on the market. There must be a law regulating this exchange. Thus we can assert that one quarter of corn equals x hundred-weight of iron, to use Marx's example. Why? He decides that there must be a third entity dwelling both in corn and in iron in equal amounts and controlling the equation. On the quest of this equivalence he launches out at once. He reasons through the process of elimination. It cannot be, he asserts outright, "either a geometrical, a chemical, or any other natural property of commodities"; nor is it their use value. Therefore, "the only one common property left" is the fact that commodities are the product of labor. The amount of labor, measured in units of time, spent on the production of articles tells us how they exchange for each other.¹

By labor he means "social labor," that is, the labor of the many workers participating in the long chain of making the tools, machinery, raw materials, as well as the labor directly expended in shaping the finished product. He implies, furthermore, not any chance amount of inefficient labor that happens to be spent on a commodity, but "socially necessary labor," that is, labor of normal efficiency, spent under normal conditions, by the bulk of substantial firms, and in consonance with the stage of productivity and industrial arts attained by social progress.² Finally,

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 44-45.

² *Ibid.*, p. 46.

he means homogeneous, abstract, unskilled labor. Skilled labor is merely resolved into multiplied simple labor, the exact reduction having been established by a "social process" and fixed by custom.¹ "We see, then, that that which determines the magnitude of the value of any article is the amount of labor socially necessary or the labor-time socially necessary for its production."²

At times he applies this theory of value quite ingeniously. Suppose the supply of linen is large, and "the market cannot stomach the whole quantity at the normal price of 2 shillings a yard," a price commensurate with the socially necessary labor-time. "This proves that too great a portion of the total labor of the community has been expended in the form of weaving. The effect is the same as if each individual weaver had expended more labor-time upon his particular product than is socially necessary."³ Likewise, if the price of some raw material, say cotton, rises, the value of the old cotton held in stock and waiting to be used rises. "This last named cotton then represents by indirection more labor-time than was incorporated in it."⁴

This theory of value is hailed customarily as the great legacy of the classical school of economists, notably of Ricardo. But this is not Ricardo's theory of value. Ricardo has constantly in mind exchange value, relative value. To him value is the power of one product to command others in exchange. To Marx value is exchange value; but it is also an intrinsic entity incarnated in a commodity, and the substance of this entity is congealed labor. Value is to be regarded "as a mere congelation of so many hours of labor, as nothing but materialized labor," and "all commodities, as values, are realized human labor."⁵ Human labor in motion creates value, but is itself not value. "It becomes value only in its congealed state, when embodied in the form of some object"; and when we state that 20 yards of linen equal one coat, "the coat ranks qualitatively as the equal of the linen, as something of the same kind, because it is value. In this position

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 52.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 46, 64, 208, 346, and *passim*.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 133.

⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. i, 241, 106, 46, 60, 77, 192, 331, and *passim*.

it is a thing in which we see nothing but value.”¹ Commodities are sold at their values, “that is to say, sold in proportion to the value contained in them.”² In other words, value is the common substance, the equivalence sought by Aristotle when he has “5 beds equal one house.”³ To Marx, then, value and exchange value are two disparate concepts. He states this plainly: “The common substance that manifests itself in the exchange value of commodities, whenever they are exchanged, is their value.”⁴

This idea of value as labor energy inundating the interatomic spaces of a product Ricardo never dreamed of. As Veblen suggests, with Hegel spirit is reality *par excellence*, with Marx material labor energy bestows meaning and value. Marx is probably coquetting here with Hegel.⁵ It is for this reason that Marx denies any value to a commodity in which there is no labor embodied. Land, animals, virgin forests have a price, he says, but no value. There is no jellified labor in them.⁶

Again, it must be emphasized that Ricardo recognizes the time element, or the rôle of capital, in the determination of the exchange value of a product: of two commodities in which the same amount of labor is contained, the one which was produced with more durable capital, or with more fixed capital relative to circulating capital, or the one that had to be stored away for some time to mature and improve its qualities before it was fit for sale — possesses more relative value.⁷ In a letter to McCulloch he says: “I sometimes think that, if I were to write the chapter on value again which is in my book, I should acknowledge that the relative value of commodities was regulated by two causes instead of by one, namely, by the relative quantity of labor necessary to produce the commodities in question, and by the rate of profit for the time that the capital remained dormant, and until the commod-

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 59.

² *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 206.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. i, 68.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 45. He starts from the equation 1 quarter of corn = x cwt. of iron in order to seek the equivalent substance. He finds it in value. “In fact we started from exchange value, or the exchange relation of commodities, in order to get at the value that lies hidden behind it.” *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁵ T. Veblen, *Place of Science in Modern Civilization*, p. 420.

⁶ *Capital*, vol. i, 47, 115, 227.

⁷ Ricardo, *Principles of Political Economy*, chap. 1, sections 4 and 5.

ities were brought to the market.”¹ But Marx recognizes no element besides labor. Even in the third volume of his *Capital*, where he modifies his theory, he maintains that fundamentally labor, and nothing else, is the basis of value.

In intimate association with value and of indispensable importance in Marx's system is surplus value. The capitalist spends money on the production of a given article, and then he sells it. This activity is represented by the formula $M - C - M^1$. With money (M), he buys the commodities (C) requisite for production, and then sells the finished product for money (M^1). Money is merely a universal equivalent, a way of measuring value, and when we say that a thing costs two dollars, we mean that as much labor was spent on making this thing as is spent ordinarily on mining two dollars' worth of gold. It is evident that M^1 is larger than M , else the whole process would involve no more than gratuitous trouble to the capitalist. $M^1 = M + \Delta M$. The capitalist realizes more money than he had laid out; he gains ΔM . This is surplus value. Our “friend Moneybags” buys the elements essential for production at their value and sells the finished article at its value, that is, on the basis of the amount of socially necessary labor-time lodged in it. Yet in the end he procures more value than he had put in.² How did M expand into M^1 , and whence did this surplus value originate?

Marx again reasons by the process of elimination. The augmentation of value does not proceed from the money (M) itself, for “as hard cash, it is value petrified, never varying”; “just as little” can it originate in $C - M^1$, that is, in the sale of the produced commodity, since the sale is merely a transformation of the article into its money form. “The change must, therefore, take place” in the first act, $M - C$, when the requisite commodity is purchased. In this particular transaction the increase cannot originate in the value of this requisite commodity, because equivalents are exchanged here. “We are, therefore, forced to the conclusion” that the change comes about in the use value of the requisite commodity bought. Surplus value originates from

¹ *Letters of David Ricardo to J. R. McCulloch*, ed. by J. H. Hollander, p. 71.

² *Capital*, vol. i, 184-185.

the use of a commodity which, bought at its value, has the power of yielding for the purchaser more value while it is being consumed.

Such a commodity is labor, or labor-power.¹ Our "friend Moneybags" buys labor-power at its value, which is, as in the case of all commodities, the amount of labor spent on the production of this labor-power — subsistence of the laborer, his education, and the expenses of rearing his children.² It may take six hours of work each day on the part of the laborer to produce the equivalent of this value. But the employer uses him twelve hours a day. The first six hours are "necessary labor-time," the additional six hours are surplus-labor time; the commodities produced in this extra period are surplus product, and their value, represented by these extra six hours, is surplus value. The consumption of labor-power is at once production of commodities and of surplus value. Commodities are thus bought and sold in the whole series at their value, but the worker is forced to yield more labor than is needed to produce his wage. The value that labor creates for the employer is larger than the value that it obtains from him in payment. The difference the employer pockets constitutes surplus value.³

Surplus value is the evidence and measure of the exploitation of the laborer by his employer. However, Marx professes to be anxious to affirm that no injustice is implied here. By exploitation he does not mean anything immoral or unethical. He does not intend to postulate that the worker is entitled to the full product of his labor; nor is his purpose to cry out against any iniquities in the distribution of wealth. He has in mind merely to indicate how the mode of production stands for class relations based on exploitation, and to present facts that will shed light on the alignment of class interests. The employer is not a robber, and the laborer is not robbed. Both are dumb agents and victims of the régime. This is the only "just distribution" possible

¹ *Capital*, pp. 185-186.

² *Ibid.*, p. 189. Cf. *Value, Price and Profits*, pp. 115-117. This is one of Marx's theories of wages. For his other theories see below pp. 227, 231 and n.

³ *Capital*, vol. i, 232.

under capitalism.¹ Marx never claims the right to the whole produce of labor, argues Engels against Menger. Marx never posits a right of any kind, his friend insists. Marx recognizes the "historical legitimacy," within limited epochs, of certain modes of appropriation, of certain social classes — of ancient slave masters, of feudal lords, of the bourgeoisie; only he claims that exploitation no longer serves as a lever of social evolution, but rather as an impediment to progress.²

Nevertheless, it is true that, while officially no appeal is intended to feelings of justice and fairness, many of Marx's expressions are obviously sentimental and inflammatory, are charged with moral indignation, and are calculated to arouse the passions. Marx is not merely a dispassionate chronicler of facts. The emotional appeal weighed too heavily in his mind to be ignored, notwithstanding protestations to the contrary.

Labor is the source of surplus value. To bring this into relief as well as to aid his further analysis of capitalism, Marx divides the capital advanced for purposes of production into two parts. In one he puts all the fixed and circulating capital which constitutes the means of production, and which either is used up gradually through wear and tear, as machinery, or is consumed directly in the production process, as coal. This part he calls constant capital (c). In the other part he has only the capital advanced to labor as wages, and this part he terms variable capital (v).³ The proportional composition of the values of the constant and variable constituents of a given capital he names the organic composition of capital. The organic composition is high when the proportion, in value, of the constant to the variable part is high, and conversely. The employer advances a certain amount of capital (C) for production: $C = c + v$. But from the sale of the commodities produced he realizes surplus value (s) in addition to this outlay; in other words, he realizes $c + v + s$. The source, the creator of surplus value, is not the constant, but the variable part of the expense; not the means of production, but labor. The rea-

¹ *International Socialist Review*, vol. viii, 646; Cf. *Capital*, vol. i, 216, 641.

² Engels, "Socialisme de juristes," *Le mouvement socialiste*, vol. xii, 109-110.

³ *Capital*, vol. i, 232-233.

son is as follows. For the constant capital the employer pays the full value, therefore there is no possibility of an augmentation of value here. It is the seller of constant capital (machinery, raw materials, and so forth) who gains surplus value on it, not the purchaser. But it is different with variable capital. The employer buys labor at one value, but he extracts from the laborer more than he pays for.

The rate of surplus value is its proportion to the variable capital, or $\frac{s}{v}$, or $\frac{\text{surplus labor}}{\text{necessary labor}}$. The rate of surplus value is an exact formulation of the degree of exploitation of the laborer by the capitalist. The higher the exploitation, the greater the rate.¹ The total mass of surplus value (S) derived in a given factory is equal to the amount of surplus value obtained from one laborer multiplied by the number of laborers. However, the employer is not thinking in terms of the rate of surplus value when he makes his calculations. It serves him no purpose to divide his outlays into constant and variable parts. Both parts are an expense to him, and on both he expects a profit. The rate of *profit*, therefore, is the proportion of surplus value to the *total* capital expended, $\frac{S}{c+v}$.²

Marx deduces three laws here. First, the mass of surplus value (S) equals the total variable capital (V) advanced, multiplied by the rate of surplus value, or $S = V \times \frac{s}{v}$.³ This implies the second law, namely, that the number of laborers may decrease, or, which is the same thing, the total variable capital may diminish, and yet the total mass of surplus value may not decrease, provided there is a rise in the rate of exploitation of labor, that is, in the rate of surplus value.⁴ The third law is an obvious consequence: the greater the variable capital, or the number of laborers, or the wage-bill, the greater will be the mass of surplus value, provided the rate of exploitation stays the same. In other words, the masses of surplus value yielded by two equal capitals but of different organic compositions will vary directly with their variable constituents.⁵ The larger the wage-bill in a factory, the larger its

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 239, 241, 332.

² *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 55.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. i, 332.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 332-334.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 334.

profits; the larger the proportion of the variable to the constant part of capital, the larger the rate of profits — other things remaining equal. It means, then, that it is to the best interest of the capitalist to keep as large a number of workers as possible and as small an outlay on fixed and circulating capital as possible.¹

This obviously contradicts experience. Capitalists do not prefer a business where the chief outlay is on wages to one where it is on means of production. Capitalists' profits do not correspond to the masses of surplus value they obtain from the laborers in their factories. The rates of profits of capitalists producing various commodities do not vary with the proportion wages bear to the total outlay. The rates of profits are rather more or less uniform, or are distributed around a "central tendency," for plants in a given industry and for different industries. The establishment that employs much labor and less constant capital, or much v and less c , will not have a larger mass of profit than an establishment using the same amount of capital but apportioning it between more constant capital and a smaller wage bill. The organic composition of capital is no guide to the rate of profit prevailing in economic life.

Marx is aware of this, and in the first volume of *Capital* he declares: "This law clearly contradicts all experience based on appearance."² The source of this contradiction is, of course, his labor theory of value, which is itself in contradiction to business practice. In fact, commodities do not exchange according to the amounts of socially necessary labor contained in them. This contradiction inevitably leads to the other one, as Marx realizes. After the discussion of the rates of profits in different lines of production, he concludes as follows:

¹ Examples. Given a rate of surplus value = $50\% = \frac{1}{2}$:

If $C = 100 = c\ 80 + v\ 20$, then surplus value = $V \times \frac{S}{v} = 20 \times \frac{1}{2} = 10$, and rate of profit = $\frac{S}{c+v} = \frac{10}{100} = 10\%$.

If $C = 100 = c\ 70 + v\ 30$, then surplus value = $V \times \frac{S}{v} = 30 \times \frac{1}{2} = 15$, and rate of profit = $\frac{S}{c+v} = \frac{15}{100} = 15\%$.

Here the variable part is smaller in the first case than in the second; therefore both surplus value and the rate of profit are proportionately smaller.

² *Capital*, vol. i, 335.

We have demonstrated that different lines of industry may have different rates of profit, corresponding to differences in the organic composition of capitals . . . ; the law (as a general tendency) that profits are proportioned as the magnitudes of the capitals, or that capitals of equal magnitude yield equal profits in equal times, applies only to capitals of the same organic composition, with the same rate of surplus value, and the same time of turnover. And these statements hold good on the assumption, which has been the basis of all our analyses so far, namely, that commodities are sold at their values. On the other hand there is no doubt that . . . a difference in the average rate of profit of the various lines of industry does not exist in reality, and could not exist without abolishing the entire system of capitalist production. It would seem, then, as if the theory of value were irreconcilable at this point with the actual process, irreconcilable with the real phenomena of production.¹

To the dissolving of these contradictions he addresses himself in the ninth chapter of the last volume of *Capital*; and to accomplish this purpose, he presents a radically different theory of value. This change of front led to an outburst of controversy as to the contradiction between the third and the first volume of this work, some maintaining stubbornly that there is no contradiction, and others, notably Böhm-Bawerk, claiming that the third volume is an unequivocal and thorough abandonment of the theory of value as presented in the first.²

Marx's new position on these problems may be best explained by means of the following tables, which are a condensation of those presented by him:³

I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
Capitals C V	Rate of Surplus Value	Surplus Value S Also Rate of Profit	Used Up Constant Capital C ₁	Cost Price C ₁ +V	Value of Commod- ities C ₁ +V+S	Price of Commodities or "Price of Production" (Produktions- preis)	Deviations of Price from Value
80+ 20	100%	20	50	70 = 50+20	90 = 70+20	92 = 70+22	+ 2 = 92 - 90
70+ 30	"	30	51	81 = 51+30	111 = 81+30	103 = 81+22	- 8 = 103 - 111
60+ 40	"	40	51	91	131	113 = 91+22	-18 = 113 - 131
85+ 15	"	15	40	55	70	77 = 55+22	+ 7 = 77 - 70
95+ 5	"	5	10	15	20	37 = 15+22	+17 = 37 - 20
Total 390+110		110					+26 - 26 = 0
Average 78+ 22							

¹ *Capital*, vol. iii, 181.

² Böhm-Bawerk, *Karl Marx and the Close of His System*.

³ *Capital*, vol. iii, 183-186.

We assume here five different branches of production, each employing the same amount of capital but of different organic compositions, as in column I. The rate of surplus value is assumed to be the same in each, 100 per cent. In each branch the amount of surplus value depends entirely on the amount of the variable constituent, equal to 100 per cent of this variable portion; while the rate of profit is obtained by dividing the surplus value gained in each case by the total capital invested, or 100. The rate of profit will therefore differ in each case (column III). We shall assume that in each branch only parts, and different parts, of the constant capital are worn out in a given period of time, say one year (column IV). The "cost price," or the sum of the costs actually incurred in production, equals the amount of constant capital actually used up added to the variable capital, $C_1 + V$ (column V). The value of the commodities produced annually in each branch of production equals the amount of constant capital used up plus the variable part laid out in wages plus the surplus value which represents time spent by the laborer for which he is not paid, or $C_1 + V + S$, as in column VI. Thus far the labor theory of value has been followed.

But such values will not prevail in actual economic experience. In reality, to the cost price is added, not the particular surplus value realized in the given branch of production (column III), but a fixed average rate of profit applied to all branches and obtained by averaging up all their respective profits. The five capitals, in other words, are regarded as constituents of one large capital of 500, with an organic composition of $390c + 110v$, and with a total surplus value of 110. The average organic composition of each capital will be one-fifth, or $\frac{390c}{5} + \frac{110v}{5} = 78c + 22v$, and the average rate of profit will be $\frac{110}{500} = 22\%$. In each branch of production the price of the commodities will be equal to the "cost price" plus this fixed average rate of profit on the total capital invested in the business, and not merely on the portion actually consumed. This Marx calls *price of production* (*Produktionspreis*) (column VII).¹ Thus commodities do not

¹ *Capital*, vol. iii, 185-186.

sell at their value. Those with a higher composition than the average (that is, where the proportion of c to v is higher than $78c : 22v$) sell above the value, and those with a lower sell below, as is seen in column VII. All commodities sell, not according to the labor lodged in them, but at their "price of production," which is Adam Smith's "natural price" and Ricardo's "cost of production."¹ But all deviations of the "prices of production" from the values are mutually canceled, as is seen in column VIII.

The example of these five employments of capital epitomizes the situation prevailing in industry as a whole. All the amounts of surplus value realized in separate industries are fused into a total mass, and its ratio to the total social capital advanced in all the industries determines the average rate of profit. Each capitalist produces in his factory a given amount of surplus value and profit, but he pockets neither this surplus value nor this profit. What he receives is an amount of profit resulting from applying this average social rate of profit to his total capital outlay. Each capitalist is like a shareholder in the total social capital, and his amount of profit bears the same proportion to the total mass of social surplus value that his capital bears to this total social capital.² "Capitals of the same magnitude must yield the same profits in the same time," whatever their organic composition.³ The costs are individual, but the rate of profit is this average social rate. Only if the composition of a given capital happens to be identical with the average composition of the total social capital, will the "price of production" equal the value of the commodity and the profits coincide with the surplus value produced by this particular capital. Such a case would be a miniature, a "sample," of the total social situation.⁴

The amount, then, of surplus value appropriated will be dependent on the variable capital only if we calculate for the *total* volume of capital in society; and only the total volume of commodities produced in all industries can be said to sell according to the mass of socially necessary labor incorporated in it. In individual cases, commodities in one branch of production will sell at

¹ *Capital*, vol. iii, 233.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 186-187.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 186-187, 203-204.

less, and in another at more, than the value according to the labor theory. But these deviations compensate each other, as we should expect, since the deviations of the items from their average will always cancel out, algebraically, as in column VIII.¹

The forces in economic life which bring about the sale of commodities at their price of production instead of their value, and which agglomerate the individual surplus values and profits into one uniform average rate of profit cause Marx a good deal of concern. He devotes to them long pages where the ideas are as abstruse as they are ingenious, where suppositions are offered as substitutes for facts, and where reckless appeals to arithmetic, especially averages, are quite in evidence.² Out of the welter a few claims can be discerned clearly. Commodities sold at their values, and the average rate of profits was unknown, only in the days before capitalism.³ But under capitalism the situation is vitiated by the operation of competition. If one sphere of production, selling its commodities at their values, realizes much surplus value and a high rate of profit according to the organic composition of its capital, another sphere employing a capital of a different composition and reaping a smaller rate of profit will immigrate into the first branch.

By means of this incessant emigration and immigration, in one word, by its [capital's] distribution among the various spheres in accord with a rise of the rate of profits here, and its fall there, it [capital] brings about such a proportion of supply to demand that the average profit in the various spheres of production becomes the same, so that the values are converted into prices of production.

In an advanced capitalist society, with mobility of labor and capital, this equilibration is accomplished in a more or less perfect degree.⁴

¹ It follows that all the concepts elaborated in the first volume, as, e. g., necessary and surplus labor-time, the value of the constant and variable parts of a given capital, suffer grotesque distortions on account of the deviations of the "price of production," or the selling price, from the value. Thus the variable capital is no longer estimated by the amount of necessary labor-time spent on the maintenance or wages of the laborers, because this maintenance sells not at its value, but at the "price of production." *Capital*, vol. iii, 190.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 203-234.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 207-209.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

Yet, even under capitalism, Marx emphasizes, the first theory of value is at bottom the genuine regulator of the second theory, and to assert categorically that commodities exchange according to their prices of production is to see the surface of things and to disregard their "internal and disguised essence"; it is to behave like the blinded capitalist himself, or like his Pindar, the vulgar economist. "Everything appears upside down in competition"; phenomena point to the second theory, but in substance they obey the first.¹ In the first place, the average rate of profit is merely a resultant of compounding the masses of surplus value, and the higher the volume of surplus value in individual branches of production, the higher this average rate of profit; and conversely.² In the second place, the "price of production" is only a derivative, although a complicated, imperfect, and remote one, of their values. A change in the labor-time spent on the production of commodities will ultimately register a change in the "price of production."³ In the third place, in so far as the migration of capital does not inundate all the nooks and crannies of industry, and in so far as an average rate of profit or a change in its magnitude fails to establish itself with celerity and smoothness, the price of commodities here and there, now and then, is for short periods dominated by the labor-time concealed within them.⁴

Marx summarizes his contention in statements like the following. "In short, under capitalist production, the general law of value enforces itself merely as the prevailing tendency, in a very complicated and approximate manner, as a never ascertainable average of ceaseless fluctuations."⁵ "Values . . . stand behind the prices of production and determine them in the last instance."⁶ He does not claim that the two theories are identical, but he urges that the first is still the heart and soul of the second, and that therefore the labor theory enunciated in the first volume is not abandoned in the third.

Be it as it may, he continues to insist that all surplus value comes from unpaid labor. Interest and profits, the incomes of

¹ *Capital*, vol. iii, 244-245, 369.

² *Ibid.*, p. 211.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 232-233.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 244. Cf. vol. i, 86.

merchants and bankers and the wages of their workers, the taxes supporting government officials and public enterprises like schools and parks — all come from surplus value filched from the proletariat in the factory and on the farm. Moreover, capital itself finds its birth and nourishment in surplus value. The worker himself forges the chains that enslave him. Convert surplus value into raw materials and machinery, and capital is formed.¹ A bourgeois may have accumulated capital by his own labor and saving. But sooner or later his capital is worn out and is replaced by a new one which finds its origin in surplus value. Capital reproduces itself by drawing from surplus value. And all existing capital is by this process of “simple reproduction” merely surplus value extorted from the laborer; it is dead labor, unpaid labor of others.² Simple reproduction, constantly renewing outworn capital, perpetuates the two modern classes and their relations — the capitalist in possession of the means of production and never losing his grip on them, and the propertyless laborer, who must amalgamate his energy with this capital before he can earn his livelihood, and who is therefore compelled to relinquish surplus value to the owner. Property is the right to appropriate unpaid labor.³

But ordinarily more surplus value is produced than is needed for sheer replenishment of the worn-out capital. As a rule, the capitalist reaps such a large amount of surplus value that, after expenditures on his personal maintenance and after replacement, he has a surplus left. Science is an aid, for with each invention and improvement in the arts the productiveness of labor is augmented.⁴ In this manner the progressive “accumulation of capital” proceeds.⁵ Capital both reproduces itself and increases in volume by the aid of surplus value; unpaid labor is its flesh and blood. Marx is aware of the claim that, besides labor, abstinence, too, plays an indispensable part in the formation of capital; but he dismisses this “unparalleled sample . . . of the discoveries of vulgar economy” with scorn and ridicule.⁶

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 634.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 624, 632–633, 637, 638, 639.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 634 ff.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 623–624.

⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 663.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 654–656.

The accumulation of capital presents two stages. During a "special phase" accumulation takes the form of amassing capital of the same nature and quality. There is no appreciable improvement in it, and therefore, as more constant capital is grown up, proportionately more labor is required to operate on it and to convert it into commodities. With the growth of the constant constituent the variable part rises in proportion. The ratio stays the same. The organic composition of the capital remains unaltered.¹

But the process of accumulation goes beyond this phase. As the bourgeois society progresses, the productive forces expand and develop. Division of labor takes place on a more extended and more complicated scale, "more skillful and profitable use of the forces of nature" is discovered, the employment of better machinery is introduced, and superior processes are adopted. Inventions, the progress of science, physical and chemical discoveries, as well as improved means of communication and greater credit facilities, play their part. The result is that labor becomes more productive. The same number of laborers will convert more raw materials and machinery into commodities than before, or a smaller amount of labor will be needed to produce a given quantity of articles.² This situation effects a reorganization in the organic composition of capital. As more constant capital accumulates, less labor is required to handle it. In other words, with the accumulation of capital its composition becomes higher, and $\frac{c}{v}$ increases. This is "the law of the progressive increase of constant capital in proportion to the variable."³ Marx recognizes the function of science here. He cites as one of the reasons why the composition of capital is lower in agriculture than in industry, the earlier and more rapid development of mechanical sciences as compared with the more recent development of chemistry, geology, and physiology, especially their later application to agriculture.⁴ Of course, while, relatively to the constant part, the variable constituent decreases, it increases absolutely. To use

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 672.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 663, 682; vol. iii, 248; *Wage-Labor and Capital*, pp. 44-45.

³ *Capital*, vol. i, 682.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 882.

Marx's example, a capital of £6000 may have a composition of 50:50. When it grows to £18000, the composition may change to 80:20, or £14400 of constant and £3600 of variable capital. Here the variable portion is relatively smaller, but it is absolutely larger than it was before, having grown from £3000 to £3600.¹

This is the phase when the "productivity of social labor becomes the most powerful lever of accumulation."² Greater productivity of labor leads to larger masses of surplus value, which are in their turn transformed into more capital. The greater the accumulation, the higher the composition of capital, and the greater the productiveness of labor. The two are reciprocally inciting and accelerating forces.³

The impelling power behind the mad rush to augment and improve the productive forces is derived from the competition raging among the capitalists. As the capitalists increase in number and strength, the desire for markets and profits is whetted, stirring them to the battle for survival. The most effective way of driving an adversary off the field is to cheapen commodities; the best way of achieving this end is to increase the productiveness of labor; and this expedient implies a higher composition of capital. The capitalist ventures therefore to adopt a more extended system of division of labor, better processes, and machinery improved by new inventions: he introduces all kinds of internal economies. As a sequel, less labor is needed to set in motion a given unit of constant capital. The value of his commodities becomes less, because less labor is embodied in each commodity.⁴ He is in a position to sell at a price lower than the prevailing "social value," that is, the market value, of such goods, but slightly higher than his "individual value." To use the revised terminology of the third volume, the price of production in his plant is lower than the price prevailing in the market, where the old methods of production are still in vogue. He at once pockets surplus profits and undersells his rivals, taking command of the field of which he crowds them out.⁵

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 683.

² *Ibid.*, p. 681.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 684-685.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 264-265.

⁵ This is the heart of the theory of competition, says Marx, and he boasts that political economy was never aware of it. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

This peculiar advantage he can enjoy only temporarily, because sooner or later competition forces his adversaries to adopt the new methods; and then the "social value," or price of production, drops for all. This lower level of prices serves as a new starting point for further competitive rivalry, leading to the further development of productive forces and to a still higher composition of capital. "That is the law which continually drives bourgeois production out of its old track, and compels capital to intensify the productive powers of labor . . . the law that allows it no rest, but forever whispers in its ears the words 'Quick march!'" This solves the riddle why the capitalist, whose sole purpose is to produce exchange value, continually strives, nevertheless, to depress the exchange value of his commodities.¹

With the increased productiveness of workers, the amount of "necessary labor" is decreased, because the maintenance of the laborer can be produced in a shorter time. Consequently, given the length of the working day, the amount of surplus value yielded by each laborer becomes larger. The same process which cheapens commodities increases surplus value per laborer. It should follow, then, that the capitalist ought to be anxious to employ as much labor as possible. However, such is not the case. On the contrary, he strives to introduce better machinery, which means capital of a higher composition, so that less labor is needed in proportion to convert the capital into commodities. This situation constitutes a capitalistic contradiction, Marx declares, and the capitalist makes up unconsciously by an excessive lengthening of the work day and by a more intense exploitation of labor.²

The incessant rivalry among the employers finds its inevitable fruits in large-scale production, in enormous outlays on plant, capital, and labor. It "lifts the processes of labor to a higher scale and gives them greater dimensions, which imply larger investments of capital for each individual establishment."³ This increase in the size and equipment of the factory Marx calls "concentration of capital," and he traces it to accumulation. But competition has further effects. The increasing initial outlays of

¹ Marx, *Wage-Labor and Capital*, pp. 44-47, *Capital*, vol. i, 348-351; vol. iii, 310.

² *Capital*, vol. i, 444-445.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 257.

capital, the repeated distress caused by the continual cheapening of commodities, and the power of credit facilities enjoyed by the big capitalist, render the position of the small employer precarious.¹ Too weak to withstand the pressure of his opponents, he drops out of the contest and joins the ranks of the proletariat, while his place is usurped by the bigger and stronger combatants. This is a new form of expropriation. One capitalist expropriates, "decapitalizes" another. "One capitalist kills many." Under the stress and strain of the contest capitals finally abandon their old positions and amalgamate in a few powerful hands. This phenomenon Marx terms "centralization of capital."

Centralization, unlike concentration, implies a redistribution of existing capital, but not necessarily new accumulations. However, it accelerates and intensifies the effects of accumulation, accentuating thereby the revolution in the organic composition of capital. Aside from this, centralization *per se* involves, not merely a pooling of existing capitals, but also their reorganization, so that capitals, when centralized, have a higher composition than the constituents previously had. Accordingly, the change in the composition of capital does not only proceed apace with accumulation, but runs at a still quicker rate, because accumulation is inevitably accompanied by centralization.²

¹ *Capital*, vol. iii, 520.

² *Ibid.*, vol. i, 685-691, 836; vol. iii, 289.

CHAPTER XII

THE FATAL WEAKNESSES OF CAPITALISM

VALUE, surplus value, and the accumulation of capital with the attending changes in its composition are essential in explaining the mechanism of capitalism. These principles also aid in disclosing the nature of the disintegrating forces functioning within the system, and of the ghastly phenomena which doom it to certain extinction.

Capitalism itself generates the elements that bring about its ruin. This view is the distinctive mark of scientific socialism, which Marx founded. Not the pious wishes of inspired people, or the enlightenment and benevolence of an improved human nature, will usher in a better world, but the relentless workings of the present order itself. Not free will and aspirations will effect the transition, but the inexorable tendencies of the natural laws of the modern system. Not teleology, but mechanistic, deterministic cause and effect condemn capitalism to death and proclaim the birth of socialism.

The capitalistic régime rests on a foundation of three fatal contradictions which germinate and ferment and ultimately release the dialectic forces that disrupt it.

First, the aim of society is gain and accumulation. The compelling motives are not production for use, service, and the development of human beings; but for profits, self-seeking, and aggrandizement. The goal is production and not consumption and enjoyment. Profits to the individual rather than social needs and benefits are the criteria of capitalist activities and successes. "Modern society, which, soon after its birth, pulled Plutus by the hair of his head from the bowels of the earth, greets gold as its Holy Grail, as the glittering incarnation of the very principle of its own life."¹ With such an ideal the expansive development of the productive forces is incompatible. Hence disastrous collisions.²

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 149.

² *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 293, 303.

Secondly, while the present system is based on socialized production, private control of the productive processes and private appropriation of their fruits are the ruling canons. Division and coöperation of labor and the alliance of the workers with social inventions render the part the laborers play in the productive process a social enterprise. The individual handicraftsman, the independent producer of an article, has vanished; the laborer has become a link in a long, complicated chain. Likewise with capital. In joint-stock companies and combinations it is gathered from the many small owners associated in the enterprise; and the continual concentration and centralization of capital represent immense aggregates of social resources. In general, capital is a product of social labor, "a collective product," a "social power."¹ Yet, whereas production is socialized, the control of industry is in the hands of private capitalists, who supervise the processes, decide upon the policies, and, on considerations of personal interests, determine the channels into which the social productive energy will flow. Moreover, the products resulting from the collective productive forces are not appropriated socially, but become the property of the capitalist who disposes of them as he pleases. Production is social in character, but the appropriation of the wealth created is private.²

A third contradiction consists in the fact that two diametrically opposite principles operate within the factory and outside, in society. Inside the factory there is order, coöperation, coördination of processes, and careful planning. But outside, in society at large, the production of the means of satisfying the wants of the community is not pursued on the basis of sensitive responsiveness to the genuine social needs. There is no carefully studied apportioning of the total social resources, and no planned, orderly direction of them into appropriate avenues. Among individual plants and enterprises complete anarchy reigns. Each capitalist first produces whatever his fancy chooses, and as much as he pleases; then he begins to search for markets. One capitalist competes with another for the opportunity to dispose of the

¹ *Communist Manifesto*, p. 32.

² *Capital*, vol. iii, 310, 312, 516; Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. 55.

commodities. There is order within the factory, but among all the industrial enterprises that are to provide for society there is *bellum omnium contra omnes*.¹

These contradictions embody the cardinal tenets and the very spirit of capitalism. Production for gain and not for use, social production but private appropriation, complete anarchy in enterprise; greed, grab, and competitive combat; exchange, private property, and competition: these are its articles of faith.

Yet Marx realizes that this creed accomplished a good deal, especially during the early days of capitalism, and he joins his friend in paying tribute to its achievements. Capitalism is a distinct advance over the preceding eras, and the above principles supplied it with a powerful urge for noteworthy attainments. The *Communist Manifesto* acknowledges that "The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together," and, after enumerating some of them, questions: "what earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labor?" "It [the bourgeoisie] has been the first to show what man's activity can bring about. It has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals."² But all this is true only up to a certain point, and while the contradictions are latent. Soon the stage is reached when they begin to assert themselves as an insurmountable obstacle to the further development of the productive forces.

The contradictions give rise to consequences which infest the capitalist organism with three fatal diseases that finally seal its doom: the misery and suffering of the laborers; the tendency of profits to fall, thus undermining the very ground on which the capitalist thrives; and the crises which throw the whole system into periodic convulsions and threaten it with destruction.

First, as to the fate of the workers. The present régime is ab-

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 391; Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. 59.

² *Communist Manifesto*, pp. 18, 16. "The bourgeois society is the most highly developed and most highly differentiated historical organization of production," says Marx (*Critique of Political Economy*, appendix, p. 300).

solutely antagonistic to, and utterly incompatible with, the welfare of the masses, the proletarians; and the further the system progresses, the more miserable becomes their lot. Surplus value is the source of gain for the capitalist. Therefore his single life purpose is to absorb the maximum of surplus labor, "to extract the greatest possible amount of surplus value, and consequently to exploit labor-power to the greatest possible extent."¹ This explains his fervent insistence on the long working day and the "civilized horrors of overwork." It explains why the establishment of the normal working day by law is the result of centuries of struggle, and why the history of the struggle is filled with the most astute devices for evasions, the most cunning subterfuges, and the most stubborn attempts to frustrate all legal moves to make the burden of the proletariat lighter.

This history Marx chronicles in detail and with appropriate remarks.² He prefaces it with the following tirade:

Time for education, for intellectual development, for the fulfilling of social functions and for social intercourse, for the free play of his bodily and mental activity, even the rest time of Sunday . . . — moonshine! But in its blind unrestrainable passion, its were-wolf hunger for surplus labor, capital oversteps not only the moral, but even the merely physical maximum bounds of the working day. It usurps the time for growth, development, and healthy maintenance of the body. It steals the time required for the consumption of fresh air and sunlight. It higgles over a meal-time. . . . It reduces the sound sleep needed for the restoration, reparation, refreshment of the bodily powers to just so many hours of torpor as the revival of an organism, absolutely exhausted, renders essential.³ . . . To the outcry as to the physical and mental degradation, the premature death, the torture of overwork, it answers: Ought these to trouble us, since they increase our profits?⁴

In the machine the capitalist finds a powerful ally in his devices of exploiting labor, and added opportunities for pumping out surplus value.⁵ The machine does not call for great muscular strength, and consequently permits the employment of women and children. While before, the head of the family worked and supported it, now the whole family slaves. The laborer sells his wife and child to the capitalist. "He has become a slave dealer."⁶ This "coining of children's blood into capital"⁷ exacts a fearful

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 257, 363.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 297-330.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 296-297.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 430 ff.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 431, 432; *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 153.

⁷ *Capital*, vol. i, 298.

toll of the tiny victims; it brings on physical deterioration and great infant mortality, it robs the "immature human being" of all opportunity to develop its mental faculties, and it induces intellectual desolation by turning the child into a machine for the fabrication of surplus value.¹

A special product of the machine is the prolongation of the working day "beyond all bounds set by human nature."² For this there is a number of reasons. The capitalist is interested in using the machine as much as possible, for a machine during idle hours undergoes depreciation, but fetches no profits.³ Then, an old machine is subject to a potential "moral depreciation," because it is rendered worthless as soon as a better one is invented. The capitalist is therefore anxious to reproduce its value in the quickest possible time. Exploitation of a doubled number of workers would require twice the amount of machinery; but the exploitation of the same number of workers for longer hours does not involve a proportionate increase of machinery and of other types of constant capital; so that more surplus value is obtained with almost the same overhead expense.⁴ Further, the sporadic use of a new machine by an astute capitalist before it is employed by his competitors nets him an excess of surplus value, because his "individual value" is lower than the normal "social value" prevailing in the market. He is therefore in haste to exploit thoroughly "his first love" during the transition period, before the universal adoption of the new invention wipes out his advantage.⁵

In general, idle capital is a loss to the owner. When the laborer rests, the capitalist loses. Capital is perpetually in need of labor to exploit. "Capital is dead labor that, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks."⁶ Therefore, "the excessive prolongation of the working day turned out to be the peculiar product of Modern Industry."⁷ This robs the laborer of leisure. "Time is the room of human development. A man who has no free time to dispose of, whose whole lifetime . . . is absorbed by his labor for the capitalist, is

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 434, 436.

² *Ibid.*, p. 440.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 441.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 442-443.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 444.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 560.

less than a beast of burden. He is a mere machine . . . broken in body and brutalized in mind.”¹ But not only does the machine prolong the working day, it also offers exceptional facilities for the intensification of the toil. The machine can be speeded up, or more machines can be placed under the care of each laborer.²

The machine is also an implacable enemy of the worker in his struggle against oppression, and a ruthless competitor for employment. The machine is the favorite means of suppressing strikes and of curbing the power of arrogant labor. “It would be possible to write quite a history of the inventions, made since 1830, for the sole purpose of supplying capital with weapons against the revolt of the working class.”³ If the wages of workers rise, the expedient employed to lower them is the introduction of more machinery.⁴ The advent of a new machine into an industry renders superfluous the workers previously engaged, and robs them of their livelihood. Marx strongly believes that machinery and inventions displace labor and cause unemployment, and on this question he argues strenuously against the classical economists. He will hear none of the talk that the introduction of machinery may prove but a “temporary inconvenience,” except in the sense that it turns the laborers out only of this “temporal” world.⁵

In general, the machine, the factory, “exhausts the nervous system to the uttermost”; “confiscates every atom of freedom, both in bodily and intellectual activity”; “deprives the work of all interest”; creates a “barrack discipline” with a “factory code in which capital formulates, like a private legislator, . . . his autocracy over the workpeople,” with “fines and deductions,” with injury to “every organ of sense” caused by the raised temperature, dust-laden atmosphere, deafening noise, and with “danger to life and limb among the thickly crowded machinery which, with the regularity of the seasons, issues its list of the killed and wounded in the industrial battle.”⁶ The laborer has no choice

¹ Marx, *Value, Price and Profits*, p. 109.

² *Capital*, vol. i, 450.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 476; *Poverty of Philosophy*, pp. 153, 183.

⁴ *Value, Price and Profits*, p. 122.

⁵ *Capital*, vol. i, 471, 478 ff.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 462-466.

but submission, because his special skill "vanishes as an infinitesimal quantity before the science, the gigantic physical forces, and the mass of labor that are embodied in the factory mechanism."¹ Intent on effecting savings so as to decrease his "price of production," the capitalist is economical about his machinery but shows "the most outrageous squandering of labor power" and "prodigality in the use of the life and health of the laborer" by scorning all provisions that would "render the process of production human, agreeable, or even bearable."² "As a producer of the activity of others, as a pumper out of surplus labor and exploiter of labor-power, it [capital] surpasses in energy, disregard of bounds, recklessness and efficiency, all earlier systems of production based on directly compulsory labor."³

Marx blames, not the machine or the factory, but the spirit of capitalism. He realizes that the machine represents the triumph of man over natural forces, and that it affords the opportunity of shortening the labor-time, of lightening human toil, and of increasing the wealth of the producers. But when in the hands of the capitalist, it stands for the direct opposite: longer hours, greater drudgery, poverty, the "martyrdom of the producer," and a means of crushing his "individual vitality, freedom, and independence."⁴ Marx also acknowledges that the aggressive power of legislation curbs more and more the avarice of the capitalist and tends to allay the laborer's sufferings. But he wishes to emphasize that capitalism *per se*, with profits and not service as its inspiring aim, promotes all these evils and displays them in lurid light whenever the arm of the law is absent or fails to reach.

Such would be the plight of the worker if conditions under capitalism were to remain static. But they do not remain static. Society is dynamic, and capital runs the spiral of accumulation, concentration, and centralization. Therefore he encounters more harassing conditions still, and his life is beset with new calamities. With increasing progress of capitalism the laborer becomes the victim of "increasing misery."

The theory of increasing misery has caused a considerable

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 462.

² *Ibid.*, p. 581; vol. iii, 103-104.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. i, 338-339.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 482, 555.

amount of uneasiness to socialist interpreters of Marx, because facts seem to contradict incontrovertibly the prediction of their master. With the advance of the present order, the misery of the proletariat is not increasing. On the contrary, a good case can easily be made out to the effect that his lot is improving. But to some socialists Marx cannot be wrong, and therefore they strain their faculties in the effort to attach peculiar meanings to this theory. Kautsky, for example, urges that it means *relative* misery, and that Marx claims only that, while the condition of the worker does improve, it does not do so as rapidly as wealth accumulates. The laborer is better off, but when he is compared with the upper classes, the disparity in fortunes is persistently on the increase in the course of time.¹ That Kautsky is erring and that Marx means just what the phrase implies — physical misery — will be shown presently.

The distinction between the two phases of accumulation must be kept in mind. During the "special phase," when the organic composition of capital stays unaltered, an increase in capital implies a proportionate increment in its variable constituent, which, to recall, is the subsistence of labor. Therefore, the demand for labor increases, and sooner or later a point is reached when "the demand for laborers may exceed the supply," and a rise of wages ensues. Such was the case during the fifteenth and the first half of the eighteenth century.² Under such conditions the dependence of the worker on capital is more endurable, for the portion of surplus value which is now returned to him in the form of a higher wage goes to improve his mode of living.

Marx assures us, however, that this circumstance in no way alters the fundamental character of wage-slavery, and by no means offers any hopes of emancipation. The system is not threatened. It only means that the chain fettering the laborer to capital "allows of a relaxation of the tension of it." There is

¹ Kautsky, in *Neue Zeit*, vol. xxvi, no. 2, pp. 542-543.

² *Capital*, vol. i, 672; *Value, Price and Profits*, pp. 120-121. This may be regarded as a supplement to his subsistence theory of wages (see above, p. 206). In the long run there is a tendency of wages to conform to subsistence; but over short periods there may be deviations, according to conditions of the supply of labor and the demand for it.

no cause for exultation. Suppose the rise in wages encroaches on surplus value to such an extent as to slacken accumulation of capital. Then the check comes automatically; the demand for labor slows down, and wages fall back to their previous lower level. Exploitation of labor is not imperiled, and the foundations of capitalism remain intact.¹

Marx emphasizes these ideas in his *Wage-Labor and Capital*, and from a different viewpoint. He tries there to demonstrate that the interests of capital and of labor are always in sharp opposition. He is discussing first the "special phase" of accumulation, saying: "And, to assume even the most favorable case, with the increase of productive capital there is an increase in the demand for labor. And thus wages, the price of labor, will rise." But this rise, he continues, does not free the laborer from relative misery. As capitalism progresses, the worker's house may "shoot up"; but if the neighboring palace "shoots up" in the same or in greater proportion, the occupant of the smaller dwelling "will always find himself more uncomfortable, more discontented." Similarly, an increase of capital results in an augmentation of wages; but it also calls forth a rapid rise "in wealth, luxury, social wants, and social comforts." Although the comforts of the laborer have increased, the satisfaction he derives is diminished, because he witnesses the tremendous comforts enjoyed by the rich but unattained by him. "The material position of the laborer has improved, but it is at the expense of his social position. The social gulf which separates him from the capitalist has widened."² It is on these statements that Kautsky bases his interpretation of "increasing misery" as meaning relative misery.

But we must remember that all this psychological misery applies only to "the most favorable case," to the special phase of accumulation. Kautsky loses sight of this. He contents himself with quoting from page 35, but he neglects to take into account what Marx says on page 43, when he leaves the special phase and turns to the more typical phase. "We can hardly believe," Marx contends, "that the fatter capital becomes the more will its slave

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 672, 677-680.

² Marx, *Wage-Labor and Capital*, pp. 35, 42.

be pampered. . . . We must therefore inquire more closely into the effect which the increase of productive capital has upon wages.”¹ This closer inquiry appears in greater detail in the first volume of *Capital*, and the conclusions are the same as in his *Wage-Labor and Capital*.

With the accumulation of capital the variable part grows smaller relatively to the constant. This diminution is accelerated by the centralization of capital ensuing upon its accumulation.² Inasmuch as the variable constituent represents the wages intended for the laborers, it follows that the demand for labor “falls progressively with the increase of the total capital, instead of, *as previously assumed*,³ in proportion to it. It falls relatively to the magnitude of the total capital.” Since the demand is decreasing, fewer laborers can be employed, and the result is a “relatively redundant population.”⁴ Relative to precisely what, Marx does not indicate. The variable constituent decreases proportionately, but increases absolutely, although in “a constantly diminishing proportion.”⁵ If this is so, the query at once arises why there should be a “relative surplus population” at all. Workers do not eat proportions and percentages, they subsist on wages, that is, on the variable capital. Once this constituent increases absolutely, there is no reason for the emergence of a relative surplus population.

Marx does not clear up this question, but a charitable interpretation of the pages he devotes to this whole problem may, perhaps, at least diminish the obscurity. An absolutely larger amount of variable capital, or a larger wage bill, does not necessarily signify that the number of employed laborers will increase. It merely implies that more labor-power will be called into action. The capitalist may employ few laborers but may compel each one to work more hours per day and more intensively, as this policy calls for fewer machines and insures economy in the overhead expenses. Further, with the growth of capital there is greater division of labor, and the processes involved in production become very elementary. Therefore women and children are employed on a

¹ *Wage-Labor and Capital*, p. 43.

² Italics are mine.

⁴ *Capital*, vol. i, 690-691.

² See p. 219, above.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 690.

more extensive scale than previously, while the adult male proletarians, the laborers *par excellence*, are forced into idleness. Thus the active army, that is, the number of real adult workers in employment, diminishes; while the reserve is swelled even faster than the diminution of the variable constituent of capital in relation to the constant.¹

The relative surplus population, the industrial reserve army, always ready, at the command of the capitalist, to be employed when needed and discharged when not needed is both an effect and a necessary condition of the accumulation of capital. With the expansion of industry, credit, and markets; with the inundation by fresh capitals of new spheres or of some old branches of production in order to invigorate and enlarge them; with the upward swing of the business cycle — part of this reserve is recruited into employment. When these outbursts subside, a part is discharged. These adventures of capital would have been impossible without a reserve army to draft from at will.²

This intermittent attraction and repulsion of laborers, this reserve army of the idle male population, bear witness to the fact that the bourgeoisie is incapable of taking care of the laboring class and its normal growth. They proclaim that, as capital accumulates, as the scale of production is extended, as the productivity of labor increases so that less labor can take care of vastly more constant capital, labor is more and more driven from employment. The very product of labor, capital turns its creators into a relative surplus population. Not that the laboring class reproduces too fast and presses on capital, but capital itself reduces the number of workers it can use, and thereby renders them supernumerary. "This is the law of population peculiar to the capitalist mode of production." Malthus was wrong.³

All this has a disastrous effect on the laborer's remuneration.

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 697-698, *Wage-Labor and Capital*, pp. 49-50. It has to be admitted, however, that the reasons for, and the concept of, a "relative surplus population" remain very obscure. In the third volume of *Capital* (p. 309) Marx acknowledges that, although the variable constituent diminishes relatively to the constant, the number of laborers employed increases absolutely.

² *Capital*, vol. i, 693-694.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 692-696.

The general movement of wages is governed by the magnitude of the "relative surplus population," the ratio of the reserve to the active army, the expansion or contraction of the reserve army through the phases of the business cycle. The forces of supply and demand operate; but the area on which they play is the "relative surplus population."¹ The reserve army is eager for employment and is in competition with those in the active army; and the larger the reserve, the greater the competition. Consequently, those employed are compelled to overwork and to submit to any terms dictated by the capitalist. This overwork robs others of employment, and thereby swells the ranks of the reserve. Still other circumstances conspire to enlarge the reserve: the all-pervasive machine displaces more and more workers; with the progress of capitalism division of labor becomes so elaborate and the processes so simple that one man can accomplish the tasks five men performed before; centralization of capital crowds out the petty employer and casts him into the ranks of the proletariat. All this renders the struggle for employment exceedingly severe.² "The industrial reserve army, during the periods of stagnation and average prosperity, weighs down the active labor army; during the periods of overproduction and paroxysm, it holds its pretensions in check."³ This play of competition and of supply and demand completes the despotism of capital and works havoc with wages.

Marx's conclusions on this question, both in *Wage-Labor and Capital* and in *Capital*, are unambiguous. In the first work we read: "To sum up: *the faster productive capital increases the more do the division of labor and the employment of machinery extend . . . so much the more does competition increase among the laborers, and so much the more do their average wages dwindle.*"⁴ In the second

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 699, 701-702. This is a second theory of wages. A third is presented when Marx says that the general movements of wages are regulated by "the ratio between the working class . . . and the total social capital." *Ibid.*, p. 700. This is a wage-fund theory. For the first theory see above, pp. 206, 227.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 698, 701-702, *Wage-Labor and Capital*, pp. 48-53.

³ *Capital*, vol. i, 701.

⁴ *Wage-Labor and Capital*, p. 52. Marx's italics. On the same pages he says: "Exactly as the labor becomes more unsatisfactory and unpleasant, in that very propor-

work he talks of the "ruinous effects" of capitalistic accumulation on the working class,¹ and concludes:

Pauperism is the hospital of the active labor-army and the dead weight of the industrial reserve army . . . along with the surplus population, pauperism forms a condition of capitalist production and of the capitalist development of wealth. . . . The relative mass of the industrial reserve army increases therefore with the potential energy of wealth. . . . The more extensive, finally, the lazarus-layers of the working class, and the industrial reserve army, the greater its official pauperism. *This is the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation.* Like all other laws, it is modified in its working by many circumstances.²

He then cites from economists who saw the baleful effect that capitalist accumulation has on the workers. The citations refer to "absolute privation of the first necessities of life," to "hunger," and to "degradation of the masses."³ He then offers numerous illustrations of this law, all dealing with abject poverty, low wages, fearful living conditions, and deterioration.⁴

It is reasonably clear, then, that by increasing misery Marx means precisely what he says — physical impoverishment — and not psychological dissatisfaction, as Kautsky would have it. Statements made in other connections bring additional evidence. The Gotha program asserts that, as wealth accumulates, "poverty and destitution develop upon the side of the workers" in proportion. Marx comments on this: "This is the law in all history up to the present time."⁵ In his speech on Free Trade he avers that "the minimum of wages is constantly sinking."⁶ The *Communist Manifesto* proclaims (page 29): "The modern laborer, on the contrary, instead of rising with the progress of industry, sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his own class. He becomes a pauper, and pauperism develops more rapidly than

tion competition increases and wages decline" (p. 49. Marx's italics). "And thus the forest of arms outstretched by those who are entreating for work becomes ever denser and the arms themselves grow ever leaner" (p. 53).

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 702-703.

² *Ibid.*, p. 707. Marx's italics.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 709-711.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 711-783.

⁵ Reprinted in the *International Socialist Review*, vol. viii (1907-1908), p. 645.

⁶ Reprinted in *Poverty of Philosophy*, appendix, pp. 223-224. See also his *Inauguraladresse der internationalen Arbeiter-Association*, pp. 18-25.

population and wealth." Engels, too, talks of "the under-consumption of the masses," of their "sinking to the Chinese coolie level," of the "retrogression in the condition of the oppressed class."¹ Indeed as long as Kautsky, or any other socialist, believes in Marx's "industrial reserve army," he is forced, in my opinion, to accept the idea of progressive physical impoverishment, which is but an outcome of the competition for work between the reserve and the employed.

Capitalism, then, has nothing to hold forth to the laborer but a miserable lot. Under static conditions he is subject to toil on inhuman terms. With the development of the productive forces, with the increasing triumph of man over nature, he is faced with new calamities. While the "special phase" of the accumulation of capital means to him physical improvement, but psychological suffering because of "relative" misery, under the more permanent and more typical phase he suffers progressive material degradation.

But no better summary can be given of Marx's view concerning the promise of capitalism to the laborer than his own:

Within the capitalist system all methods for raising the social productivity of labor are brought about at the cost of the individual laborer; all means for the development of production transform themselves into means of domination over, and exploitation of, the producers; they mutilate the laborer into a fragment of a man, degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine, destroy every remnant of charm in his work and turn it into a hated toil; they estrange from him the intellectual potentialities of the labor-process in the same proportion in which science is incorporated in it as an independent power; they distort the conditions under which he works, subject him during the labor-process to a despotism the more hateful for its meanness; they transform his life-time into working-time, and drag his wife and child beneath the wheels of the Juggernaut of capital. . . . It follows, therefore, that in proportion as capital accumulates, the lot of the laborer, be his payment high or low, must grow worse. The law, finally, that always equilibrates the relative surplus population, or industrial reserve army, to the extent and energy of accumulation, this law rivets the laborer to capital more firmly than the wedges of Vulcan did Prometheus to the rock. It establishes an accumulation of misery, corresponding with accumulation of capital. Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental

degradation, at the opposite pole, that is, on the side of the class that produces its own product in the form of capital.¹

Neither does the bourgeois escape unscathed. There are further consequences of the contradictions within the bosom of capitalism which strike hard at the capitalist himself. The same forces that prepare increasing misery for the worker usher in a lugubrious phenomenon for the capitalist also. The tendency of the rate of profits to fall is the second dark offspring of the present order.

As the present régime advances, the productive forces develop; accumulation, concentration, and centralization of capital proceed at a rapid pace; the productivity of labor increases. All this implies a reorganization of capital, so that the variable portion decreases relatively to the constant and, naturally, relatively to the total capital. This is true, by and large, of individual capitals in the various spheres of industry as well as of the entire capital at work in society. A relative decrease in the variable constituent signifies a corresponding relative diminution of surplus value, once a given rate of surplus value has been established in society; for, we recall, the total mass of surplus value equals the total variable capital times the rate of surplus value, or the rate of exploitation.²

Now the relation of the total amount of surplus value obtained by society to the total social capital fixes the average social rate of profits. This relation ($\frac{S}{C}$) becomes constantly smaller. "The gradual and relative growth of the constant over the variable capital must necessarily lead to a *gradual fall of the average rate of profit.*"³ This law, Marx tells us, is of supreme importance in capitalist production, and economists "cudged their brains," attempting to penetrate its mystery. But they were unsuccessful, because they failed to delve into the nature of surplus value and of the organic composition of capital; in other words, because they did not see fit to analyze economic phenomena precisely in the way that Marx did.⁴

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 708-709.

² $S = V \times \frac{S}{v}$.

³ *Capital*, vol. iii, 248-249, 252-254; Marx's italics.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

The fall of the *rate* of profit does not imply a fall in the *mass* of surplus value or in the *mass* of profit extracted by a given society. The mass of surplus value, and therefore of profit, increases; but since the total social capital increases still faster, the rate of profit falls.¹ On a given capital, say, on every \$100, there will be an absolute decrease of surplus value and profit, but the number of such \$100 units becomes progressively larger, and therefore the absolute mass of surplus value is on the increase.² The same laws which work for the greater productiveness of labor, for a relative fall of the variable capital, and for a hastened accumulation, are manifested in "a growing increase of the employed total labor-power, a growing increase of the absolute mass of surplus value, and consequently of profits."³ In fact, Marx teaches, an absolute progressive growth of the mass of profits is inevitable on the basis of capitalist production.⁴

The same fate applies to individual industries where concentration or centralization of capital has been achieved. With the expropriation of the smaller capitalists, the larger survivors find themselves in the possession of more capital, larger armies of labor, and bigger markets. Therefore, while the social rate of profits is low, the mass of profits in such industries will rise, because it is derived from a tremendous amount of capital, and because of the large total of surplus value yielded by the immense volumes of labor-power.⁵

Here, too, the mad rush for gain and the desire to eliminate the competing adversary are the animating incentives; and the cheapening of commodities is the effective weapon. No capitalist would voluntarily introduce a new method of production, and thereby capital of a higher composition, knowing that such an act would ultimately lead to a lower rate of profit. But he is lured to this policy by the prospect of the additional profits which he temporarily harvests because his individual price of production is lower than the market price where the old methods still prevail — until the new method is generally accepted and is followed by a fall in the rate of profit.⁶ Competition also acts for another reason. The

¹ *Capital*, vol. iii, 254. ² *Ibid.*, p. 259.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 257-258, 261.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 257, 274-275.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

powerful capitalists are attempting to expropriate the smaller ones in order to recoup themselves for the diminishing rate of profit by a gain in the mass of profit resulting from the centralized capitals after the expulsion of those who could not stand the race. Just as accumulation and centralization accelerate the fall of the rate of profits, so a fall in the rate of profits hastens accumulation and centralization.¹ Again, the small new capitals, born of additional accumulations, suffer because of the low rate of profit. They search for employment in frantic competition with the older capitals. All these circumstances raise one capitalist against another. The anarchy of production becomes more intense, and the disruptive forces become more menacing.²

One may wonder, Marx says, why in face of the enormous industrial progress made under the present régime, the fall of the rate of profits has not been more rapid; why profits have not become *nil*, in fact. The reason is that there are some counteracting factors. This explains why the falling rate of profits is termed by him now a law, then a "tendency, that is, a law whose absolute enforcement is checked, retarded, weakened by counteracting influences."³ Some of these factors are various methods of reducing the value of the constant capital as it increases in volume (increased productivity of labor, for example) and foreign trade.⁴

But chief among the counter-balancing agencies are those connected with exploitation of labor and with "increasing misery." The intensification of the toil, caused by the speeding up of the machinery and especially by the prolongation of the working day, serves to raise the rate of surplus value and consequently the rate of profits. Then "depression of wages below their value" is "one of the most important causes checking the tendency of the rate of profits to fall."⁵ Further, relative overpopulation allows various backward industries, as well as those which receive the stir toward further improvement, to take advantage of the unemployed and to engage during the transition period large masses of labor, with the result that the variable capital is kept large in re-

¹ *Capital*, vol. iii, 283.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 300-301.

³ *Ibid.*, title of Part 3 (p. 247); p. 275.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 272-282.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

lation to the constant. In these industries "wages are below the average, so that both the rate and mass of surplus value are exceptionally high"; and inasmuch as the average social rate of profit is dependent on the amounts of surplus value produced in individual spheres, such a condition helps in stemming the tendency of profits to fall.¹ The accumulation of wealth needs the increasing misery of the laborers to feed on. Only by trampling over the proletariat can the capitalist seek refuge from the hostile forces he has provoked.

The falling rate of profits is a menace to the very existence of capitalism. The strength of this régime depends on the volume of gains, for the level of profits determines the rate of the accumulation of new capitals. The spectre of slender gains drives off the field the continual small rills of savings, flowing from numerous sources, seeking employment, growing upon their profits, ready for centralization, and contributing to the strength of the capitalist system. Accumulation is dried up. If, Marx says, the formation of capital becomes the prerogative only of large centralized capitals, "the vital fire of production would be extinguished. It would fall into a dormant state." The goal and life process of capitalism is threatened, and the whole system finds a fatal drawback. "Hence the fright of the English economists over the decline of the rate of profits. That a bare possibility of such a thing should worry Ricardo shows his profound understanding of the conditions of capitalist production." The falling rate of profit proves that capitalism creates its own limits, and that the system is doomed to extinction by the very productive forces it calls into service.²

Overpopulation, in Marx's sense, with its attendant, increasing misery, and the falling rate of profits do not exhaust the list of the diseases of capitalism. The régime is in addition afflicted with recurrent dramatic breakdowns, which do not represent incidental failures of an otherwise well-working system, but which are inherent in its very nature. These chronic fits, or crises, disclose in an impressive way the contradictions on which society is

¹ *Capital*, vol. iii, 277-278.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 304, 283.

built, and expose in ghastly relief the maladies that infect the capitalistic organism. Marx's chief explanation of crises is found in the third volume of *Capital*.¹ His exposition is fragmentary and obscure. However, the central ideas stand out with some degree of clarity.

The theory is well known. The main cause of crises is overproduction, of consumer's goods as well as of capital.

The end and aim, the sum and substance, of capitalism is accumulation and self-expansion of capital. The source of capital is surplus value. The process of obtaining surplus value resolves itself into two acts. One is performed in the factory where commodities are produced, part of which represents surplus value. The second act is the fruition of this surplus, which can take place only when the products are sold in the market. Surplus value is not only to be produced, it must be realized through exchange. One act is to sow, the other to reap. These two stages are not functions of one another, for they are not so connected that an expansion in the one necessarily entails an expansion in the other. On the contrary, they are entirely out of harmony with each other. The volume of production depends on the development of the productive forces and is therefore capable of unlimited expansion. The sale of goods depends on markets. Markets, however, offer effective resistance to the growth of production. The intensity with which a market can be developed varies with the power of the masses to pay for increased consumption. But of this power they are deprived, since capitalistic distribution of wealth implies a deluge of riches at one pole and of poverty at the other. Nor can new markets be easily found. As Engels asserts in the preface to the first volume of *Capital* (page 31), "While the productive power increases in a geometric, the extension of markets proceeds at best in an arithmetical ratio."

The consequences are as follows. With the progressive development of the productive forces, the manufacture of commodities, and therefore of surplus value, goes on at a tremendous pace. Floods of articles are thrown into the market by competing capitalists, eager to sell and reap profits, but guided by no plan or

¹ *Capital*, vol. iii, 285-303.

caution. It becomes increasingly difficult to dispose of the products in the old markets or to find new ones. Soon a glut occurs, and a stagnation or a complete cessation of production ensues. There is overproduction; but not in the sense that too many necessities of life have been produced in proportion to the population. "The reverse is true. Not enough is produced to satisfy the wants of the great mass decently and humanely." There is overproduction in the sense that too much of a supply has been produced to enable the capitalist to sell at a price which will provide ordinary profits.¹

Overproduction leads to a crisis with its devastating effects on society. Industry is at a standstill, the proletariat is unemployed, and its misery is more acute. The basic inconsistencies of capitalism are clearly revealed here. Social production coupled with private appropriation of the fruits, production for profits and not for use, discord and anarchy of production in society at large, in contradistinction to the harmony and coöperation within the factory — all these serve as an impediment to the progress of the productive forces and to the perpetuation of the system itself.²

Marx and Engels emphasize that the true cause of crises is overproduction, and are greatly irritated over those who ascribe it to underconsumption. Marx argues that "it is purely a tautology" to claim that the poverty of the masses and their inability to pay for products lead to crises; in fact, he says, wages rise before the impending breakdowns.³ Likewise, Engels excoriates Dühring for holding to a theory of underconsumption. Engels urges that underconsumption is a constant phenomenon, for it has prevailed ever since society was split into exploiting and exploited classes. The variable is overproduction, which began to occur but recently. Only a vulgar economist can explain crises, not by the new factor of overproduction, but by the old one of underconsumption.⁴ This, however, does not prevent either of them from stressing the very view they so hotly denounce. Marx pronounces

¹ *Capital*, vol. iii, 301-303.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 285-287; *Communist Manifesto*, pp. 19-20; Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, pp. 62-67.

³ *Capital*, vol. ii, 475-476.

⁴ *Anti-Dühring*, p. 237.

that "The last cause of all real crises always remains the poverty and restricted consumption of the masses."¹ And Engels talks in a similar vein, although in less emphatic terms, when he says: "Modern industry . . . forces the consumption of the masses at home down to a starvation minimum, and in doing thus destroys its own home market."²

Concurrent with the overproduction of commodities goes the overproduction of capital. With increased compilation and concentration of capital comes a gradual fall in the rate of profits. Small capitals, the offshoots of new accumulations, or small capitalists with meager funds, can find no adequate returns. This signifies that there is overproduction of capital; again, not in the sense that there are too many means of production, — this is meaningless, since the desire for capital is insatiable, — but in the sense that there is too much to promise a good return. A point is reached where additional capitals can find no remunerative outlet.³ The unemployed capital competes with the employed, and the rate of profits falls still lower,⁴ just as the industrial reserve competes with the active army, with the consequence that wages fall below the previous level. United when gains are to be harvested, the capitalists find their interests severed when losses are to be shared. Some capital is doomed to lie fallow, and equilibrium can be established only when a number of factories close down. In this competitive turmoil the whole productive process receives a shock, and paralysis sets in.

During a crisis capital is the first sufferer, because it undergoes violent depreciation, and for the following reasons. At the falling rate of profit a large capital earns as much as a smaller capital did at a previous higher rate; therefore, to all intents and purposes, a large equipment is equivalent to a small capital.⁵ Again, capital whose value is based on the surplus value it will fetch in the future falls in value because of the diminution of receipts. Finally, since the commodities on the market can be sold only at greatly re-

¹ *Capital*, vol. iii, 568; see also pp. 301-302.

² *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. 62.

³ *Capital*, vol. iii, 295, 299-300, 302-303.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 304.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

duced prices, the capital destined to be created out of part of the diminished proceeds shrinks with them. This fall of prices, Marx adds, disorganizes the function of money as a medium of exchange and "The chain of payments due at certain times is broken in a hundred places and the disaster is intensified by the collapse of the credit system. Thus violent and acute crises are brought about, sudden and forcible depreciations . . . and finally a real falling off in reproduction."¹

Credit, then, plays a part in bringing about crises. Marx expresses this idea in various connections. Credit promotes the inauguration of multitudes of new enterprises, encourages swindles, speculation, and reckless adventures. The owner of credit, possessing an instrument that actually belongs to others, wields it without caution or deliberation. Credit strains the productive forces to the utmost, drives production beyond all reasonable bounds, accelerates overproduction, and thereby hastens the violent eruptions. Credit is "one of the most potent instruments of crises and swindle."² However, it is not to be taken as a cause of crises. Marx teaches:

The superficiality of Political Economy shows itself in the fact that it looks upon the expansion and contraction of credit, which is a mere symptom of the periodic changes of the industrial cycle, as their cause. As the heavenly bodies, once thrown into a certain definite motion, always repeat this, so is it with social production as soon as it is once thrown into this movement of alternate expansion and contraction.³

The overproduction of capital brings to view another "contradiction" on which Marx insists. The capitalist is eager to preserve the value of the existing capital and, moreover, to expand it. But the productive forces he sets at work defeat his purpose, ruthlessly operate for a depreciation, and even halt the process of accumulation. He is bent on the augmentation of capital, but the agencies he unleashes lead to its devastation. The very creatures of the bourgeois are inimical to his narrow

¹ *Capital*, vol. iii, 298. New ways of looking at the connection between the destinies of capital and crises are developed in the second volume of *Capital*, pp. 211, 545-547, 608.

² *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 522, 573-576, 713.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. i, 695; *Briefwechsel zwischen F. Engels und K. Marx*, vol. i, 130.

ideal — production, accumulation, for profit and not for the benefit of society. Capital cannot increase its value without depreciating or annihilating it, cannot build without destroying part of itself in the process, cannot go on in its work without periodically paralyzing the whole system.¹

Soon, however, forces begin to work for a revival of industry. Stagnation in production, since it decreases employment and renders labor submissive to drastic reductions in wages, creates a new opportunity for the expansion of surplus value. With the depreciation of capital, the rate of profits rises, because profits are calculated on lower capital-value. Again, the low level of prices and the competition among capitalists impel many to adopt new methods, to introduce new machinery in order to decrease "individual value" as compared with the "social value" ruling in the market. Industry receives a stimulus, starts with hesitation, and soon livens up with increasing momentum. The cycle is ready to renew its course.²

In crises Marx and Engels see a prominent force that will destroy the present system. Crises are levers of revolutions. The main cause of the upheavals in 1848 Marx sees in the crisis of 1847, and he claims that the revival of industry following after 1848 accounts for the subsequent political reaction over the Continent. A genuine revolution, he teaches when discussing the events of 1848, is possible only during crises, when the modern productive forces are in rebellion against the bourgeois form of production; and he predicts that "a new revolution is possible only in the wake of a new crisis. One is just as certain as the other."³ Engels is of the same mind. In 1886 he points out that the ever-recurring crises in England since 1825 increase unemployment and enhance the sufferings of the workers, exasperating them into a combat; and he threatens that "we can almost calculate the moment when the unemployed, losing patience, will take their own fate into their own hands."⁴ The prophecy is that in

¹ *Capital*, vol. iii, 292-293, 303.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 299, 303-304.

³ *Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich*, pp. 9, 101-102.

⁴ Preface to *Capital*, vol. i, 31-32.

time crises will become more widespread and more severe, and will ultimately culminate in a chronic "universal" breakdown which will bring the whole capitalist order to a dramatic standstill.¹

¹ *Capital*, vol. iii, footnotes on pp. 142, 574; vol. i, 26.

CHAPTER XIII

THE TRANSITION TO SOCIALISM

ALL these sinister phenomena of capitalism bear irrefragable testimony to the fact that the system is bankrupt, and that the capitalists are no longer fit to hold the reins. The bourgeois class receives much, but it has nothing to offer in return. It is the trustee of the social wealth,¹ it controls the industrial activities which supply the life blood of the community. It is regarded as the backbone of present society. For this it enjoys stupendous privileges. It is allowed to amass great wealth in capital, which is but labor filched from others; it owns the natural resources, which, as a gift of nature, are the common possession; it profits gratuitously by the increased productiveness resulting from the heightened efficiency due to the mere togetherness of masses of labor in the factory; it appropriates freely the priceless social acquisitions in the domain of science;² it enjoys the support and protection of institutions and laws, the praise and approval of respectable people.

But it has complete disregard of the duties and tasks such privileges impose. It wields its power with revolting recklessness and without any thought of responsibility. It pockets all the benefits of its enterprises, ravishes the natural resources, cheats the people with adulterated commodities, indulges in swindles, corrupts officials with bribery,³ laughs at the laws, and deludes the com-

¹ *Capital*, vol. iii, 312.

² "Once discovered, the law of the deviation of the magnetic needle in the field of an electric current, or the law of magnetization of iron, around which an electric current circulates, cost never a penny." (*Capital*, vol. i, 422.) "Such a development of the productive power is traceable in the last instance to the social nature of the labor engaged in production; to the division of labor in society; to the development of intellectual labor, especially of the natural sciences. The capitalist thus appropriates the advantages of the entire system of the division of social labor." *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 98. See also *Ibid.*, pp. 753-754.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. i, 556; vol. iii, 100.

munity through its mouthpieces, the army of educators, clergymen, and journalists. It is a sinister figure in society, standing athwart the path to all that is good.

Moreover, it offers proof positive of its utter incapacity to discharge the functions it assumed. By its fruits we know it. It forces upon the proletariat a life of misery. "It is unfit to rule, because it is incompetent to assure an existence to its slave within his slavery," cries the *Communist Manifesto*.¹ It is incapable of maintaining the level of profits, and thereby an uninterrupted augmentation of capital, and a progressive development of the productive forces. Periodically it rocks the whole system with violent convulsions followed by complete breakdowns. It is "a class under whose leadership society runs headlong to ruin like a locomotive whose closed safety valve the engine driver is too weak to open." "It is becoming more and more not alone a social superfluity but a social impediment. It takes an ever diminishing part in the work of production and becomes more and more, as the noble did, a mere revenue-consuming class."² It is entrusted with vital tasks, it exacts gigantic rewards, but in the discharge of its duties it fails tragically. A radical change must come.

It will come. But neither divine intervention, nor the universal Reason, nor the free will of great men, nor the skillfully planned utopias will bring it about. The change to a new order is an evolution, a natural historical outgrowth of the present system, an objective cause-and-effect process, just as evolution in nature is. In the very capitalist system are embedded the seeds of its own destruction and the elements destined to blaze the trail toward a new order. Modern society moves within the vicious circle of its own contradictions; "this circle is gradually narrowing . . . the movement becomes more and more a spiral, and must come to an end, like the movement of the planets, by collision with the center."³

The indefatigable dialectic is grimly at its work. The three fundamental contradictions of capitalism up to a certain point

¹ Page 29.

² Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 183, 192.

³ Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. 60.

give impetus to the development of the productive forces. But finally the stage is reached when these contradictions turn the mode of production into an implacable enemy to any further development of these forces: witness the increasing misery of the proletariat, the falling rate of profits, and the recurrent crises. The mode of production thus becomes entirely incompatible with the very stuff of which its life is made. Accordingly, the productive forces rebel against the system and threaten it with destruction. "The task and privilege" of the capitalist is to develop the productive forces which constitute the elements of a higher order. Such a task he has already achieved.¹ He is capable no longer of controlling them or of making any further use of them. All this only proves that the present system is relative to a certain historical period, and that it is transitory. The career of the capitalist is terminated.²

But the very productive forces which seal the doom of the present régime are the material out of which the new one will shape itself. And already in present society there are intimations as to how they will be employed in the future order. These "signs" are provided by the joint-stock company with its "social capital" — social, because it is supplied by many investors and consequently represents a "social enterprise" — and the co-operative factory where "associated laborers" plan their work and dispense with the spectacular figure of the capitalist. The coöperative movement is a particularly good omen in the eyes of Marx. In his inaugural address to the "International" of 1864, he hails this movement as a great "triumph of the political economy of labor over the political economy of capital." The value, he continues, of these "great social experiments" cannot be overestimated. They demonstrate that production can proceed on a large scale and in accordance with modern science without the existence of a master class; that, to produce commodities, the

¹ "It is one of the civilizing sides of capitalism that it enforces this surplus labor in a manner and under conditions which promote the development of productive forces, of social conditions, and the creation of elements for a new and higher formation better than did the preceding forms of slavery, serfdom, etc." *Capital*, vol. iii, 953. Cf. vol. i, 649.

² *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 304, 522.

means of production need not be monopolized as a means of dominating and exploiting the worker; that, like slave-labor and serf-labor, wage-labor is only a transitory form "destined to disappear before associated labor, which brings to its task a willing hand, a vigorous spirit, and a joyful heart."¹ Coöperation, social production, social appropriation, and production for use, will be the guiding tenets of the future system.²

The old order disintegrates, and the new one is molded by objective "necessity." Socialism does not descend on us, like a meteor, from an extraneous world; our own history brings it to us. However, the process cannot enact of itself. There must be human beings who will carry it out in consonance with the dictates of the external agencies. These actors are the proletarians. The capitalist cedes his place to the workers as the chief performers in history. The proletarians are the worst sufferers from the present régime. All its deficiencies bear down on them principally with overwhelming weight. The trend of their fate is toward the worse, while during crises their misery is enhanced. They become increasingly convinced that the present order has nothing to offer them but degradation, and that capitalism is incompatible with the promotion of their interests.

Apparently, unlike all others, they are no victims of "illusionism," and they are not perverted by vulgar economics. The silent forces operating within modern society, the specific diseases that beset it with shortcomings and failures, the contradictions that will ultimately shatter it, are clear to their view. They are the only ones to discern the true nature of the relentless transformation of the present into the future society. They understand that the coming system alone can dissolve all their troubles. Humiliated, starved, brutalized, exasperated, they perceive that history entrusts them with a noble mission — to further and coöperate with the forces that work for the new synthesis, the new régime. They accordingly discipline, organize and prepare themselves for the purpose of carrying out the mandates of the dialectic forces.

¹ *Die Inauguraladresse der internationalen Arbeiter-Association*, pp. 27-28.

² *Capital*, vol. iii, 516-517, 521.

The means they will employ are the only historical means available for effecting progress — the class struggle.¹

Marx and Engels, as we have seen, discuss at length the nature of the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the supporters of feudalism for the establishment of the capitalistic system. Likewise, the conflicts for the socialist order and the steps that will assure it a permanent foothold receive their attention. The question that interests the socialist and non-socialist alike is whether, according to these two writers, the final struggle will be effected through a sensational bloody battle or through peaceful means, through a sudden revolution or a quiet, lengthy process. This question cannot be settled with absolute certainty, for on this point there is an abundance of obscurities and inconsistencies. But broad conclusions may be drawn.

First of all, it must be noted that there is no clear guiding principle. True, the dialectic process at work in society is, with Marx, at once the principle of social evolution and the hidden power behind the class struggle. But the dialectic *per se* does not furnish the information whether the future social synthesis will be achieved by a revolutionary cataclysm or by peaceful measures. The dialectic allows of either method. It may be presumed that the old thesis is too narrow to withstand the pressure of the anti-thetic elements crowding in on it, and therefore it is torn apart, suddenly and violently. Force, Engels says, plays a revolutionary rôle in history; it is the instrument of effecting social movements and of breaking up dead political forms.² "Force," Marx claims, "is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one."³

On the other hand, it may be conceived that the dialectic may not operate in such a precipitant, bloodthirsty manner, and that the advent of a new synthesis is consummated by gradual adjustments. Marx acknowledges this. On the Continent, he says, the progress of social disintegration "will take a form more brutal or more humane, according to the degree of development of the

¹ Cf. *Capital*, vol. i, 836-837 and n.; *Civil War in France*, p. 80; Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 183-184.

² *Anti-Dühring*, p. 213.

³ *Capital*, vol. i, 824.

working class itself. . . . It [society] can neither clear by bold leaps, nor remove by legal enactments, the obstacles offered by the successive phases of its normal development. But it can shorten and lessen the birth-pangs.”¹ The midwife, then, may be of a milder disposition.

The discussion must therefore turn to the scattered opinions expressed by Marx and Engels on this question. When these opinions are assembled, and then arranged in chronological order and examined in their juxtaposition, an interesting fact stands out. In the period around 1848, Marx and Engels were composing odes to physical violence, whereas after that period, and to their death, they realized that the proletariat can gain ascendancy by other means, gradual and peaceful.

In 1847 Marx concludes his *Poverty of Philosophy* as follows:

Would it, moreover, be a matter for astonishment if a society based upon the *antagonism* of classes should lead ultimately to a brutal *conflict*, to a hand-to-hand struggle as its final *dénouement*? . . . It is only in an order of things in which there will be no longer classes or class antagonism that *social evolutions* will cease to be *political revolutions*. Until then, on the eve of each general reconstruction of society, the last word of social science will ever be: “Combat or death; bloody struggle or extinction. It is thus that the question is irresistibly put.”²

The *Communist Manifesto*, written in the first month of 1848, is full of revolutionary threats, and among its last sentences we read: the communists “openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling class tremble at a communistic revolution.”³ Marx talks in the same vein in his historical sketches written in 1850 and 1851.⁴

But even at this period, when bloody revolution appeared as the only expedient, they did not gloat over violence, but regarded

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 14.

² *Poverty of Philosophy*, pp. 190-191; Marx's italics.

³ *Communist Manifesto*, p. 58. The *Manifesto* states that in the early phases of the development of the proletarian class the struggle is but “veiled civil war”; but ultimately the stage will be reached “where that war breaks out into open revolution, and where the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie lays the foundation for the sway of the proletariat,” (p. 28). See also p. 52.

⁴ See *Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich*, p. 85, for example, and *18th Brumaire*, p. 141.

it as a distasteful although unavoidable instrument. In 1847 Engels prepared a catechism of socialism. Question 16 queries whether the abolition of private property in a peaceful way is possible. The answer states: it is much desired that this were possible, and the communists would be the last ones to stand against it; they know that revolutions are not made purposely and willfully, but are the necessary consequences of circumstances independent of the will of parties and classes; they see that the development of the proletariat is violently suppressed in almost all civilized countries, and that thereby the opponents of the communists pave the way to a cataclysm; if the oppressed proletarian is finally driven to revolution, the communists will stand by him.¹

In the later years the tone changes. Marx and Engels begin to emphasize that no sudden transformation by forcible means is feasible; that there is no one prescribed instrument of effecting social change; that the means vary with the country, circumstances, and institutions; that peaceful parliamentary measures are quite possible and are indeed preferable in lands where democratic institutions prevail. In 1867 Marx praises the beneficent effects of protective labor legislation. He assures the workers that coöperative production, extended to a national scale, will finally liberate them. Further, in order that they may propagate the coöperative movement by "national means," and in order that they may counteract the many impediments which the bourgeoisie will seek to place before them at each step, he exhorts them to conquer political power through the political organization of workers' parties.² In the same year he also writes, as was quoted above, that on the Continent the conflict can be brutal or humane, depending on the development of the proletariat, and that society can shorten and lessen the birth-pangs.³ At a meeting of the Congress of the International at the Hague in 1872 he says:

¹ Engels, *Grundsätze des Kommunismus*, p. 23.

² Marx, *Inauguraladresse der internationalen Arbeiter-Association*, pp. 26, 28-29.

³ *Capital*, vol. i, 14. In 1871 he writes to Kugelmann that on the Continent the military bureaucratic machinery cannot be taken over, but must be broken — on the Continent, but not elsewhere, in England or America, for instance. *Neue Zeit*, vol. xx, no. 1, p. 709.

We know that the institutions, the manners and the customs of the various countries must be considered, and we do not deny that there are countries like England and America, and, if I understood your arrangements better, I might even add Holland, where the worker may attain his object [that is, "capture political power"] by peaceful means. But not in all countries is this the case.¹

In 1891 Engels declares that in countries like the United States, France, and England, where the majority rules, and where the power is vested with the representatives chosen by the people, the old society can grow into the new in a peaceful manner.² In 1894 he writes as follows: As soon as the socialists come into possession of political power, they will expropriate both the industrial manufacturers and the landowners; whether the expropriation will proceed with or without compensation will depend, not on the socialists, but on circumstances; "under no conditions do we regard indemnity as inadmissible; very frequently Marx expressed to me the opinion that the cheapest way would be to buy off the whole gang."³ In 1895, a few months before his death, he summarizes in his introduction to Marx's *Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich* the lessons that could be drawn from the socialist movement since 1848. He admits that Marx's and his ideas around 1848-1850 pertaining to the proletarian conflict were based largely on the examples of the French revolutions of 1789 and 1830, but that history has exposed their views "as an illusion . . . it has also totally recast the conditions under which the proletariat has to fight."⁴ First of all, it is clear, he says, that the old style of rebellion, the sudden enthusiastic onslaught on the military forces, is no longer even to be thought of; insurgents behind barricades are merely so much fodder for the cannons handled by trained soldiers.⁵ There is a new method of proletarian warfare to be followed and a better weapon to wield: the ballot. This the German socialist party had demonstrated. "They had shown their comrades of all countries a new weapon, and one of the keenest, in showing them how to use the ballot."⁶ Propaganda, organization, votes for laws favor-

¹ Quoted by Kautsky in his *Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, p. 10. Cf. *Capital*, vol. i, 32.

² *Neue Zeit*, vol. xx, no. 1, p. 10.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. xiii, no. 1, p. 305.

⁴ Reprinted in the *International Socialist Review*, vol. iii, 1-2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 11.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

able to the worker, the election of government officials out of his own midst, the gradual acquisition of political power, are the tactics to be diligently pursued. It will be only a matter of time, then, before the swelling ranks of the organized proletariat will "become the determining power in the land before which all other powers must bow down."¹ "The irony of history turns everything upside down," Engels exclaims: "We, the 'revolutionists,' the 'revolters,' prosper far better by lawful measures than by unlawful measures and violence . . . we under this lawfulness are getting firm muscles and rosy cheeks and are the picture of eternal life."²

Of course, even during this later period Marx and Engels are mindful of the fact that violence, although not to be welcomed, is yet not to be spurned; it has its historical significance in aiding social change, Engels suggests in 1878.³ In 1895, in the above-mentioned preface, he asserts that in countries where the ballot is not used effectively, the right of revolution shall not be relinquished: "The right of revolution is after all the only actually 'historical right.'"⁴ But it seems reasonable to conclude that in later years Marx and Engels saw in universal suffrage a weapon destined to supplant the violence of revolution. In this opinion concur Dr. Masaryk,⁵ Professor Karl Diehl,⁶ and Bernstein.⁷ Lenin, in his *Staat und Revolution*, argues strenuously that according to Marx the sole means of attaining political power is physical force. But he is hardly convincing, in spite of his shrewd pleading.⁸

Why did Marx and Engels change their views after the period of 1848-1851? It is hard to tell. Marx never had a Boswell. But some suggestions may be ventured. In the early period they were fiery men in their thirties, smarting in exile, fresh with the memories of abuses dealt out to them by various governments; while

¹ *International Socialist Review*, vol. iii, 12.

² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

³ *Anti-Dühring*, p. 213.

⁴ *International Socialist Review*, vol. iii, p. 12.

⁵ *Sur le Bolchévisme*, pp. 15 ff.

⁶ Rectorial speech at the University of Freiburg, May 8, 1920, pp. 40 ff.

⁷ *Evolutionary Socialism*, pp. x, xiv.

⁸ Lenin's controversy is given extensive discussion by Dr. W. Mautner, in *Bolschevismus*, pp. 120-220.

later, older age brought a cooler attitude and a calmer way of looking at things. There were doctrines of evolution before and throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, but Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859 impressed people's minds with the idea of gradual development; and Marx and Engels were eager followers of the achievements of science. Actual experience of the uprisings of '48 and later convinced them that a few enthusiasts cannot prevail against bullets and cannon balls directed by skilled hands. Again, in the eighteen-forties, and for a while afterward, the plight of the workers appeared to be serious. There were no effective factory laws and no public opinion favoring the laborer to any considerable extent. He was helpless. It was a time when so judicious a person as John Stuart Mill was pessimistic about capitalism, doubted whether all the inventions lightened human toil, and wondered at times whether socialism held better promise.¹ A brutal conflict seemed to Marx and Engels the inevitable means of emancipation. But later, when the worker gained dignity, power, and suffrage, they began to see hope in other expedients.

When political power has been won by the proletariat, his "historical mission" is by no means ended. A given society cannot be turned into a radically different one at a single stroke. Once in power, the worker has before him the laborious task of gradually dissolving the capitalistic strongholds, institutions, and mechanisms, and of supplanting them with organs of the new order. It requires a long period for the old to die out and for the new to accumulate vitality for a vigorous, independent existence. Therefore, between the ascending of the workers to the political helm and the complete establishment of the socialistic régime there intervenes a period of social transformations.²

This is the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The experiences of '48 and of the Paris Commune convinced Marx and Engels that the victorious workers cannot take over the capitalist state machinery and employ it as an instrument whereby to carry out their purpose, the erection of a socialist system. The old state

¹ E.g., p. 208, in his *Principles of Political Economy*.

² Engels, *Grundsätze des Kommunismus*, questions 17 and 18.

must go, and, for the duration of the transition period, a new political form must be instituted, the dictatorship of the proletariat.¹ This expression was probably first employed by Marx in 1850 in *Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich*. On page 94 we read: "This socialism [that is, "revolutionary socialism"] . . . is the class dictatorship of the proletariat as a necessary transition to the abolition of class differences." A similar statement made by Marx in a letter to Weydemeyer is quoted by E. Drahn in his *Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels über die Diktatur des Proletariats*.²

The expression "dictatorship of the proletariat" suggests a despotic government headed by a handful of ruthless persons who rob the people of all choice save submission to decrees from above. But this Marx and Engels never had in mind. By such a form of government they mean no less than a democratic republic. This is clear in all their utterances. The *Communist Manifesto* teaches: "the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of the ruling class; to win the battle of democracy."³ In his criticism of the Erfurt program Engels says explicitly: "If anything is well established, it is this: our party and the working class can come to mastery only under the form of a democratic republic. This is the specific form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, as the great French Revolution had already shown."⁴ Marx describes the Paris Commune as a truly democratic experiment and as a stepping-stone to socialism.⁵ And in the introduction to this work Engels exclaims: "Well, gentle sirs, would you like to know how this dictatorship looks? Then look at the Paris Commune. That was the dictatorship of the proletariat."⁶

¹ Introduction to *Communist Manifesto*, p. 9; Marx, *Civil War in France*, p. 80, Engels's introduction, p. 17. "Between the capitalist and the communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. To this there corresponds also a political transition, in which the state can be nothing else than the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat." *International Socialist Review*, vol. viii, 656. ² Page 8.

³ *Communist Manifesto*, p. 41. Likewise, in Engels's *Grundsätze des Kommunismus* the answer to question 18, concerning the phases of the revolution, states: "it will first of all set up a democratic political constitution."

⁴ *Neue Zeit*, vol. xx, no. 1, p. 11.

⁵ *Civil War in France*, pp. 78, 84, 85, 80.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

The precise steps that will be taken by the victorious dictatorship in order to prepare the ground for the socialist régime are outlined in detail in the *Communist Manifesto*. This document advocates successive "despotic inroads on the rights of property." It recognizes that the measures will vary in different countries, but "in the most advanced countries" the following are recommended: abolition of land property and of inheritance; a heavy progressive income tax; centralization of banking, credit, transportation, and other means of communication, in the hands of the state; equal liability of all to labor, and so forth. These measures, it adds, will "necessitate further inroads upon the old social order," until the new system is completely introduced.¹ However, these measures are declared later to be antiquated, and referring to them in their joint preface of 1872, Marx and Engels confess that "That passage would, in many respects, be very differently worded today."²

The activities of the Paris Commune furnish henceforth the example to follow. The organization and undertakings of the Commune are recounted by Marx. It was composed of municipal councilors elected in the various wards and revocable at will. It was not a parliamentary body only, but simultaneously a legislative and executive one. It instituted universal suffrage, suppressed the standing army, and substituted the "armed people"; the judges, police, and officials in all government departments were elected by the masses, and were the responsible agents of the Commune and subject to recall at any time; they were all made public servants and at workers' wages; the educational institutions were opened gratuitously to everybody; it abolished night work for the bakers; prohibited employers from reducing wages; and the workshops and factories closed by the capitalists were, "under reserve of compensation," taken away and turned over to "associations of workmen."³ It was "the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labor," once its political emancipation had been achieved. No

¹ *Communist Manifesto*, pp. 41-42.

² *Ibid.*, preface of 1872, p. 9.

³ *Civil War in France*, pp. 9-10, 74-75, 85.

more details are given. Marx assures us that the workers of the Commune had no ready-made utopias to promulgate, and they fully realized that the higher society would arrive after "long struggles" and after a "series of historic processes, transforming circumstances and men."¹ No other particulars are outlined anywhere else by Marx or Engels relating to the consummation of the far-reaching economic changes requisite for a socialist order.

This dictatorship of the proletariat is still a political state, in the view of these two writers. Marx expressly declares that the transition period between capitalism and communism is the dictatorship of the proletariat, and that it is a state.² Engels, likewise, says that the Commune eliminated the bad features of the state, but that the state can be completely abolished only in the future when a new race of men is born.³ This is quite in harmony with their political theory. The dictatorship still coincides with the existence of classes — the dying bourgeoisie and the triumphant proletariat fulfilling its mission of despoiling the capitalists and of building the socialist régime. Some kind of organized force is still to be maintained in order to subdue a possible revolt of the class that is being expropriated.⁴ Herein lies one of the chief differences between our two revolutionaries and the anarchist. The latter desire the abolition of the state immediately after the proletariat has won supremacy. But Marx and Engels maintain that political authority is indispensable while society is being transformed into a socialist commonwealth. Engels asserts that, if the Commune had not armed itself, it would not have lasted a day.⁵

It is apparent, however, that this proletarian state is not as rigorous as the erstwhile capitalistic state. Engels is justified in saying about the Commune that it was not a state "in the proper sense."⁶ The dictatorship represents the proletarian class, which

¹ *Civil War in France*, pp. 78-80.

² *International Socialist Review*, vol. viii, 656.

³ Preface to *Civil War in France*, p. 20. The *Communist Manifesto* says (p. 41) that the instruments of production will be centralized "in the hands of the State, i. e., of the proletariat organized as the ruling class."

⁴ Marx, *Neue Zeit*, vol. xxxii, no. 1, p. 40; Engels, letter to A. Bebel, reprinted in the latter's *Aus Meinem Leben*, vol. ii, 322.

⁵ *Neue Zeit*, vol. xxxii, no. 1, p. 39.

⁶ In the above-mentioned letter to Bebel, p. 322.

is the bulk of society; therefore, to this extent, such a government is congruous with society and is not a force superimposed over it, while under capitalism the state is the machine of the minority working against the majority. Again, this proletarian state is transitory, and it is fully aware of this fact. It does not insist on self-perpetuation; on the contrary, all its activities are directed toward the building of a society where it will become entirely superfluous. Finally, the ruling class wielding the state-power in this case is not based on economic strength. It does not draw its energy and prestige from its position in the relations existing among the participators in production; in other words, the proletariat is not economically the dominant agent, and the bourgeois is not the subordinate agent, in the realm of commodity manufacture. The state here is therefore not rooted in the mode of production; it is merely a temporary political expedient essential in a scheme of establishing a new system.¹

When the dictatorship of the proletariat has accomplished its work of transformation, the era of communism dawns on this world. But as yet it is not genuine, thoroughgoing communism — for that a new race of men with complete ignorance of the fleshpots of capitalism is required. “The present generation is like the Jews whom Moses led across the desert. It has not only a new world to conquer — it must perish in order to make room for men who will have been reared into a new world.”² This new society has just issued from the lap of capitalism. It still harks back in some respects to the old order; and “economically, morally, and intellectually” it bears some of its features. This society Marx terms the first phase of communism, a phase that is generally called socialism. It knows no private property, no classes, no exploitation; everybody works, and production is carried on by “associated” laborers. But distribution still has the stamp of the capitalistic conception of equality of rights. From the aggregate of commodities that society produces two funds are, first of all, subtracted: one for productive purposes, as replacement of capital and a reserve against accidents, and an-

¹ Cf. Lenin, *Staat und Revolution* pp. 60, 84; Mautner, *Bolschevismus* p. 153.

² Marx, *Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich*, p. 85.

other for the cost of administration, which Marx promises will decrease as society advances, and for schools, sanitation, and aid to the invalids. Of the remainder each laborer obtains a share in proportion to the amount of work he has rendered. He is rewarded on the basis of his contribution.

This is seemingly in accordance with perfect equality of rights. And indeed it is an application of right superior to the capitalistic practices, for there is no appropriation of somebody else's labor, no surplus value, no exploitation. There is equality of rights, since labor is measured for all by the same standard, namely, its duration and its intensity. Nevertheless, Marx urges, this sort of equality of rights is encrusted with bourgeois imperfections and limitations. People are unequal physically and mentally. Some can work longer and more intensively than others. Accordingly, they will receive more remuneration, although their wants may require much less. Then some are married and have families, and their needs may far exceed the compensation received for their work. Accordingly "this 'equal right' is unequal right for unequal work." It is a right to inequality of enjoyments and possessions. But, Marx concedes, it cannot be different in the early stages when the new society is tainted with some remnants of bourgeois ideas.¹

In progress of time the second, the higher phase of communism arrives. This is the apotheosis toward which the historical process irresistibly moves, and in which it finds its triumphant achievement. No traces are left of capitalism. The state has dissolved itself and vanished, since a society which knows no classes, no exploitation, and no need of surveillance over rights, does not call for it. "The government of persons is replaced by the administration of things, and by the conduct of the processes of production. The state is not 'abolished.' *It dies out.*"² There are left only a few administrative functions, the purpose of which is to guard the public interests.³ Instead of a state, there is a commonwealth, a society; a community dedicated to the tasks of produc-

¹ Marx, on the Gotha program, *International Socialist Review*, vol. viii, 647-649.

² Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, pp. 76-77. Engels's italics.

³ Engels, *Neue Zeit*, vol. xxxii, no. 1, p. 39.

tion, and inspired by the proposition that it is easier to cope with nature and to develop in all directions when people unite and organize their efforts. This is the ultimate *societas perfecta* that Marx is dreaming of, the historical masterpiece, the final synthesis after which the dialectic goes to rest well satisfied with work well done.

It is a wonderful society. The bizarre anomalies of social production and private appropriation; of coöperation inside the factory and anarchy outside, in society; of production for profits and not for use, are long-forgotten nightmares. Production becomes social in the truest and widest sense. Everybody works, and no one lives off the toil of his fellow being. Labor becomes the first requirement of life. People are associated in their daily work as freemen, ardently interested in discharging their tasks in the most efficient manner. The productive relations are those of equals coöperating for the mutual good. There is no relation of mastery and subordination, no class gradations and class strife. Outside the factory there exists neither anarchy nor competition. Society pools all its assets in labor, capital, natural wealth, and scientific knowledge; calculates scrupulously the myriad of diverse wants and needs of its members; plans with assiduous care for all the phases of productive enterprise; and apportions wisely the gigantic resources among the multifarious industrial channels so as to ensure an uninterrupted and bountiful stream of products. The productive forces grow without restraint, "and all fountains of confederate wealth flow more freely."

In parallel to this social coöperative production, goes on social enjoyment of the fruits obtained. There are no rapacity and extortion, no superior claims of owners, no lion's shares arrogated to idlers. After the necessary deductions have been made for the maintenance of public institutions and social enterprises, the wealth is enjoyed by all the members of society; and not according to their contributions, but in harmony with higher principles. The narrow bourgeois notion of right is banished, and society inscribes on its flag: "Each according to his capabilities; to each according to his needs!"¹

¹ Marx, on the Gotha program, *International Socialist Review*, vol. viii, 649; Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 240-241.

The soul of capitalism is the amassing of wealth. "That is Moses and the prophets!" Accumulation for accumulation's sake, production for production's sake, that is the ideal. Men are secondary; they are means, not ends. But in this "new and better society" the final aim and the inspiring ideal is the full and free development of each individual, the expansion of his intellectual and social capabilities, the enrichment of his personality.¹ "In bourgeois society, living labor is but a means to increase accumulated labor [capital]. In communist society, accumulated labor is but a means to widen, to enrich, to promote the existence of the laborer." Society is no longer a bevy of toilers for the few exploiters, in a poisoned atmosphere of class antagonism. Society becomes "an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."² Man, his well-being, his spiritual development, are the ultimate goal, the final criterion that this future commonwealth sets for itself. Production and accumulation are not the primary considerations; at most they are merely the means toward the attainment of a glorious goal.

But the human being does not gain in dignity and freedom only because he develops his capabilities and widens his horizon. He becomes free in a still larger and more profound sense. He becomes master of his environment. Under capitalism, where competition and exchange are the ruling principles, man is subject to the domination of his product. "Blind, coercive laws" operate athwart his productive undertakings, conjure up results and phenomena on which he has not calculated, and in puzzling ways work counter to his expectations, harassing and baffling his mind. He does not understand fully the agencies he employs and the true nature of his activities. Not so in the new society. Men no longer allow things to follow their course, and trust no more to the anarchic ways of competition. They coöperate, plan, and control their processes of production. They gain, further, more knowledge concerning their natural and social environment, thanks to the acquisition of leisure after a shorter working day and to the

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 649, 652, 581; Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 240-241.

² *Communist Manifesto*, pp. 33, 42.

unfettered growth of science. They therefore no longer work in the dark, relying on secret laws, but act in full consciousness of the principles governing each sphere.

This is the essence of freedom. Freedom does not postulate independence of laws, or willful, capricious conduct. It rather consists in the possession of a full comprehension of the principles at work, in the intelligent application of them to desired ends, and in the clear foresight as to the results that will follow. Nature and the productive forces will no longer face man as strange phenomena controlled by inexorable laws, each time asserting themselves "blindly, forcibly, destructively." Man confronts them with the power of his intelligence and knowledge, harnesses them to his purposes, and turns his wayward master into a willing servant. "The associated producers regulate their interchange with nature rationally, bring it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by some blind power; . . . they accomplish their task with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most adequate to their human nature and most worthy of it."¹ This mastery of man over his environment is the triumph of the new régime. The new society proclaims "the ascent of man from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom."²

¹ *Capital*, vol. iii, 954.

² Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 147-148; *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, pp. 56, 72, 80-82.

PART V

SOME CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF
MARX'S THEORY OF HISTORY

CHAPTER XIV

A SUMMARY OF THE CRUCIAL CLAIMS OF THE THEORY

THE critic of Marx is assured beforehand of a host of professional opponents. The socialists resent attempts to lay violent hands on the sacred dicta of their leader. Marx is *their* man, and the materialistic interpretation of history is an important article of their faith. They heap abuse on any intruder upon the hallowed grounds. They forget that the theory of history is of interest and importance to the non-socialist student of economics, history, sociology, and philosophy, and that, as a contribution to social science, it is subject to examination and criticism by those interested in these fields of knowledge. A physicist may be a socialist, but that should not deter non-socialist scientists from analyzing his studies in physics and from pointing out weaknesses. By their attitude of intolerance to outsiders the socialists merely emphasize the religious character of their beliefs and doctrines. They give the impression that what Marx says cannot be wrong, and that one who presumes to scan his writings and to dissent is deserving of harsh treatment. For example, anyone who reads Professor Seligman's *Economic Interpretation of History* dispassionately must be convinced that he deals fairly with Marx. But Professor Seligman dared to declare that society is also the playground of other forces than economic, and that there can be more than one interpretation of history. This displeased Louis Boudin, who took him to task, quoted the passage in question, and laughed it to scorn. Boudin had not chosen to apply to the writings of Marx as high standards of discrimination and such meticulous care for the soundness of concepts as he applied to Professor Seligman's quotation.¹ *Quod licet Jovi non licet bovi.*

The socialists derive amusement from the fact that the "bourgeois" critics disagree as to the standing of Marx in social science. Some consider his intellect one of high order, while others belittle

¹ L. B. Boudin, *The Theoretical System of K. Marx*, pp. 41-45.

his ability and his work. The socialists use this lack of unanimity to discredit all critics and to show how futile are the attempts to detract from their giant. They do not suspect that the fault may be Marx's. Where the case is dubious, the doctors disagree. There is little dissension over the importance of the contributions of men like Newton, Kant, Darwin, Comte, Adam Smith.

The socialists also insist that outsiders consistently misinterpret and misrepresent Marx. The critic's vision is circumscribed, they say, by his narrow bourgeois horizon, and therefore he cannot fathom the depth and full meaning of Marx's statements. Whatever the critic holds to be Marx's view, the socialists adroitly prove the contrary, if it suits their purpose, by citing a passage from Marx which gives the opposite view. But are the critics to blame? Marx took insufficient pains to make himself understood. Lenin and Kautsky were lifelong students of Marx, yet they disagree radically with respect to his views on the state and the class struggle.¹ The socialist journals are full of heated controversies over the meaning of concepts, laws, and views enunciated by Marx. Even such an admirer of Marx as Professor Sombart confesses that the more he studied him the more he realized the justice of Roscher's verdict that Marx had no ability to reduce a complicated phenomenon to its simpler elements.² When an author is obscure, careless in expression, and incessantly contradictory, he is bound to be interpreted in different ways. Pareto is right when he likens Marx's statements to bats: you can see in them something that looks like a mouse and something that appears like a bird.³

To undertake a complete criticism of Marx's theory of history would call for omniscience, since it touches on every phase of human knowledge. The critic would have to be conversant with the genesis and nature of such institutions and ideas as law, politics, state, family, religion, morality, science; he would have to possess knowledge of anthropology, biology, economics, history, sociology, psychology, philosophy; he would have to be clear

¹ Lenin, *Staat und Revolution*.

² *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, vol. xxvi (1908), 444.

³ *Systèmes socialistes*, vol. ii, 332.

about the nature of the forces that operate in history and determine the progress of civilization, and about the ends toward which the destinies of humankind are tending. The criticism which follows is planned on a modest scale and will deal with only a few phases of Marx's theory. After an introductory summary of some of Marx's crucial contentions, the theory will be tested empirically by an appeal to some of the general facts of history; its broad and some of its fundamental deficiencies will be indicated; certain specific weaknesses of its most important elements will be discussed; and, finally, a few words will be said about its significance for social science.

We must first draw up a definite account of the specific claims advanced by the protagonists of the materialistic interpretation of history. One preliminary question is this: Just what are the peculiar relations of the mode of production to the institutional and ideological superstructure? What link do Marx and Engels interpose? In the direct statements of their philosophy the connections between production and the other phases of civilization are designated in various ways; but they must pin their faith to some one formula if their theory of historical development is to be taken seriously.

At times they assert that the régime of production and the class relations issuing from it constitute the basis, the groundwork (*Basis, Grundlage*) upon which all human institutions are erected, and from which all ideas irradiate.¹ If by basis or groundwork they imply no more than the habitat, the container, such declarations can hardly qualify as an interpretation of social life and social change. What we seek in a philosophy of history is the ruling forces, the governing causes, and not the habitat. A *locus standi* does not account for the phenomena that take place on it. A glass contains a liquid or a powder; but the glass does not determine the nature of the liquid or of the powder, the chemical composition of these objects, or their behavior under various

¹ *Communist Manifesto*, Engels's preface of 1883, reprinted in Sombart's *Grundlagen und Kritik des Sozialismus*, vol. i, 128; Marx, *Critique of Political Economy*, p. 11, *Capital*, vol. i, 200 n.

conditions. To state that the economic substructure is the basis of history is not to disclose the nature of history and the character of all the departments of social life.

We also meet pronouncements to the effect that "in the last instance," and "ultimately," economic production is found to be the chief moment in social evolution. Such statements embody significant claims only if they can be taken to mean that, when we delve below the surface and earnestly search for the true causes, when we make a real effort to disentangle all the elements at work in society, we discover that, after all, production is the governing factor. But if "the last instance" reduces itself to the assertion that all the phases of civilization can be traced back to production as the remote, primary fact, as the distant origin that gave them the initial impetus, such utterances are of little value. The priority of one set of phenomena can hardly imply that they must be vitally bound up with, and serve as the persistent controllers of, the subsequent set of phenomena.¹ We shall agree quite readily with Engels that man must eat and clothe himself before he can engage in politics and philosophize about religion. *Primum vivere, deinde philosophari*, said the ancients. But this truth *per se* by no means establishes the fact that these antecedent performances mold and control politics and religion, or that ideas are visceral and not cerebral. Priority is not causation.

Likewise, genesis hardly supplies an adequate explanation of the nature and the vicissitudes of historical events. To give a homely illustration, a chicken is produced artificially in the electric incubator. The chicken is bought by a person living on a crowded street, who allows it to roam at large. The fowl is run over by an automobile and is killed. Can we assert that Benjamin Franklin is the "ultimate" cause of the fate of this chicken? True, he was one of the pioneers who studied electricity, and who thereby gave rise, later, to electric incubators. But the death of the fowl cannot be laid at his door. It was caused by forces unconnected with him. To assert that in the mode of production we see the ultimate origin of the institutional and ideological aspects of society is far from explaining the character of these

¹ Cf. V. Pareto, *Traité de sociologie générale*, vol. i, §§ 343, 344.

institutions and ideas. If the remote origin is the salient factor, why start with the mode of production? We might as well go further back and designate the primal star dust as the origin of all things and as the explanation of the course of human destinies. The one attribution of origin will be almost as enlightening as the other.

There is only one view that commands serious attention, the view that claims a *causal* connection between production and the other phases of history. In the light of all their statements of the theory, it is safe to conclude that this is the view they generally have in mind, whether or not they always succeed in giving it precise expression. Such an interpretation of their idea commends itself to the reader by virtue of several considerations. Even when Marx and Engels mention production as the foundation of history, they generally hasten to add that with a change in the foundation a corresponding alteration will ensue in the whole superstructure;¹ that this foundation alone "explains" all the institutions and ideas of a given epoch;² that definite (*bestimmte*) social forms of consciousness correspond to (*entsprechen*) the economic basis;³ and that economic relations are the determining (*bestimmende*) basis of the history of society.⁴ It is clear that by foundation they do not mean an innocuous, impassive habitat, but something affiliated with the superstructure, something calling for a definite correspondence in the phenomena resting on it.⁵

Again, in nearly all the other direct announcements of their theory there is either a hint or a definite expression of a causal connection. Marx states that the principles, ideas, and categories are shaped "conformably" with the social relations flowing from

¹ Marx, *Critique of Political Economy*, p. 12.

² Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, preface of 1888, p. 7; *Anti-Dühring*, p. 48; *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. 41.

³ Marx, *Critique of Political Economy*, p. 11.

⁴ Engels, letter reprinted in A. Labriola's *Socialisme et philosophie*, p. 257, and in Woltmann's *Historische Materialismus*, p. 248.

⁵ The exceptions are scarce where Marx and Engels mention production as the foundation, without the accompaniment of suggestive or explicit modifications: the only exception that came to my notice is in Engels's preface of 1883 to the *Communist Manifesto*, reprinted in Sombart, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

production;¹ that the mode of production conditions (*bedingt*) the social, political and spiritual life process in general (*überhaupt*); that social existence determines (*bestimmt*) the consciousness of men.² Engels declares that all "historical transactions are very easily explained" with a sufficient knowledge of the economic state of society;³ that production is the determining (*bestimmende*) moment of history, and social institutions are conditioned (*bedingt*) by production;⁴ that production and exchange are the "ultimate cause," the "great moving power,"⁵ the "final causes,"⁶ in the last instance, the "determining (*bestimmende*) moment" of history.⁷

Another question before us is whether Marx holds that the mode of production is the sole governing cause in history. This question is of basic significance, and no criticism of his theory ought to forego a candid consideration of it. Unfortunately, no categorical and assured answer can be ventured upon.

Three views may be entertained, two differing widely and one occupying a somewhat middle ground. One possible contention is that Marx envisages production as absolutely the only controlling factor of history, while all the other phases of civilization he holds as passive resultants, as pale shadows. This contention may be rejected without hesitation or argument. It must be conceded that at times Marx and his friend say things that are consistent with such an interpretation of their position. But when the whole case is kept in mind, such a view clearly becomes untenable. It should suffice to recall the effect attributed at times by both writers to the action of human institutions and ideas. Another conceivable argument is that Marx considers production as only one of several dominant and independent elements that govern the sequence of historical events; that the material and spiritual factors coöperate; that the work of the

¹ *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 119.

² *Critique of Political Economy*, p. 11. See the original in German.

³ See Liebknecht, *Karl Marx, Biographical Memoirs*, p. 49.

⁴ *Origin of the Family*, p. 9. See the original in German.

⁵ *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. xviii.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁷ Letter, reprinted in Labriola, *op. cit.*, p. 241, and Woltmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 239-

economic forces is consistently modified by and interwoven with the work of other autonomous forces; and that, consequently, there is no reason for attaching primary importance to economic as against non-economic agencies. This view must be discarded as unhesitatingly as the first: it is incompatible with every cherished claim of the materialistic interpretation of history.

Marx's real attitude is somewhere between these extremes. The mode of production is the most powerful cause of history; institutions and ideas are indeed, directly or indirectly, mere derivatives of economic activity, but they are not altogether passive. At times they retard or accelerate the effects of production. But they cannot pretend to modify, except in an inconsequential way, the results flowing from the conditions created by production. Institutions and ideas are not dormant, they are active; only they act as auxiliaries, as servants doing the will of the master, the will they cannot alter appreciably.

To this conclusion we are driven whether we appeal directly to the writings of Marx and Engels, or to some general considerations. In the different statements of their theory (some fifteen of them) they point to only one factor as governing the destinies of man; and that factor is production. There is no intimation that other independent forces may conceivably claim a part in the historic drama. Undoubtedly Marx and Engels were writing in the warmth of controversy; undoubtedly a protagonist of a favorite idea is prone to neglect the elements that compete with the one element he regards as supreme; nevertheless, if other agencies had been weighing heavily in their minds, it is difficult to see how they could consistently ignore them, and how again and again they could declare emphatically and unequivocally that all phases of social life are the results of economic activity, and of that alone.

Further, their scattered general discussions of the origin, nature, and efficacy of institutions and ideas show the same attitude. These agencies are not passive; they have repercussions on the economic elements. But they do not act autonomously, they merely carry out the mandates of production. They can retard or hasten, they can modify to a slight measure the results of economic

production; but they can achieve no more. Laws will accelerate factory development; the state may aid in the speedier introduction of capitalism; religion helps, in an instance or two, in the promulgation of the republican form of government. But these are cases where the "ideologies" cooperate with and further the imperial commands of economic forces, but cannot thwart them or modify them appreciably. Institutions and ideas reign; they do not govern.

Finally, the case is hardly different in some of the late letters written by Engels in response to friendly inquiries or in reply to the onslaughts of critics. He shows a conciliatory attitude and speaks in tones that fall strangely upon ears accustomed to his and Marx's declarations. He admits that the economic situation is not the only active cause, and that there is in history an interaction of forces; he cites instances — of minor importance, however¹ — where the economic factor is absent or not supreme. But he invariably strives to emasculate these admissions. In each letter he adds that the interaction of the various agencies proceeds "on the basis of economic necessity"; that it is an interaction of unequal forces; that through all the "accidents" the economic movement prevails (*durchsetzt*) as an implacable "necessity"; that among the interacting elements the economic circumstances are "the finally decisive ones," that "the economic movement is the most powerful, the most original, the most decisive," and that among all the relations on which history is based the "economic relations . . . are in the last instance the decisive relations, and they form the guiding thread which alone leads to an understanding of it [history]." ²

From all this we gather that history marches to the fifes and drums of economic conditions engendered by a mode of production. The march can be retarded or accelerated by other forces; it can even deviate slightly from the main road; now and then this

¹ He mentions that the German dialects are the consequences of the geographic environment; that war and conquest may destroy economic resources and, "under certain conditions," efface a local or national economic development. Letter reprinted in Labriola, *op. cit.*, pp. 243, 251, 253.

² Letters reprinted in Labriola, *op. cit.*, pp. 241-243, 250-253, 257, 259-260; or in Woltmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 239 ff.

or that marcher may be out of step; and occasionally one of the marchers may venture away into a side alley. But the march is to the fifes and drums.

This interpretation of Marx's doctrine is reinforced by some general considerations. To write a theory of history is to undertake a stupendous task. The forces at work are to be delineated, sequences and uniformities are to be exhibited, and the concatenation of the various elements and their mutual interactions are to be traced. Marx and Engels fully realize this, and indeed they subject one element of history to such treatment. They demonstrate how it functions, they indicate what effects it produces, they establish its cycle of evolution, and they show what forces introduce changes in it. What element is it? It is the mode of production and the classes it brings into being. Had they thought that other elements were of similar power in history, they would have accorded them, too, similar treatment.

It is not sufficient for Engels to concede in letters to friendly protestors and to unfriendly critics that of course other forces are also important. It is not sufficient for socialists to retort that here Marx mentions race as of significance, that there he intimates that tradition is to be taken into account, that in one place he drops a word about the geographical factor and in another about "outside historical influences." How significant? How take into account? Why? In what sequences? In what organic intermingling with other agencies? These questions must be answered. These questions are not answered. To present an itemized list of the "factors" that ought to be taken into account, — and Marx fails to do even this, — and to argue that this list contains a theory of history is a mere gesture. Is it not tantamount to stating that the source, content, and cause of literature are to be traced to the dictionary?

Further, the goal and final test of a scientific proposition can best be demonstrated by its power of prediction. When the theory leaves the *terra firma* of known facts and projects itself into the tenuous atmosphere of the unknown, it discloses its real character. To foretell the destinies of civilization is Marx's ambition. This leads him to a pivotal application of his theory, an

application that furnishes incontrovertible evidence as to what his philosophy really is. Now what method does he press into service, what factors is he examining, and on what reflections is he placing reliance in order to emerge with the conclusion that socialism is the goal of the future? The mode of production, with its dialectic and class struggle. Neither political forces nor religion, neither legal power nor morality, neither idealism nor leadership receives attention; and all talk of geographical environment, race, tradition, and "other" historical influences is completely ignored.

We cannot presume to penetrate the recesses of Marx's mind. We cannot surmise and speculate upon the possible and conceivable elucidations and concessions, modifications and retractions that he would have made in friendly good-humored discussion, in calm and reasoned argument, when confronted by well-meaning critics; or what he might have written if a longer and less turbulent life had furnished him the opportunity to elaborate on his ideas of history and to present a consistent and complete philosophy. What might have been, we have no means of knowing. Learned, well read, well traveled, gifted with rare intellectual powers, he might have made interesting and notable contributions. But speculations and divinations are out of place. All we have to do is to examine what his pen has left. And the conclusion is clear. Whether put forth in formal pronouncements or casual discussions, in the heat of controversy or in less militant moods; whether scrutinized in the light of logic or tested by general considerations, his view discloses one fact: production is the alpha and omega of history, all else is a vexatious parenthetical digression. Except for slight modifications, retardations or accelerations brought about by other agencies, the mode of production is the prime cause of history, the sole cause.

CHAPTER XV

AN EMPIRICAL TEST OF THE THEORY

WHAT is meant by the statement that one thing is *a* cause of another thing, and by the assertion that one thing is the *sole* cause of another thing? Without assuming to enter at all deeply into this difficult problem, we may consider it sufficient for our purposes to say that A is regarded as a cause of B if, under a given set of circumstances, we invariably find that phenomenon A is followed by B, and that a change in A will lead to a change in B. If the circumstances are modified because other elements are introduced, such uniformities may not be observed, and yet A may still be regarded as a cause of B; for in such a case the other elements may have their own influence on B, and therefore will modify or counteract the action of A on B. Similarly, when we assert that A is a cause of B, we do not intend to claim that under any circumstances whatever, when we see B or a change in it, we must infer that A was present or that a change in A has taken place. Under other circumstances A may have been absent, but something else may be in causal connection with B. For example, a rise in the temperature will lengthen a copper rod. But we cannot claim that, whenever we observe a lengthening in the rod, the inference is to be drawn that it was caused by a rise in the temperature. It may have been produced by stretching, or by hammering at the extremities.

The case is different when one claims that A is the *sole* cause, the prime cause of B, the force that "in the last instance" determines B. Here we expect not only the same relations as when we regard A as *a* cause of B, but a still more rigid dependence of B on A. Whenever we observe B, we are compelled to conclude that A preceded it; and under whatever conditions we discern a change in B, we must infer that it could not have occurred without a corresponding change in A. For if B, or a change in B, occurs with-

out A, or a change in A, it means that other forces enjoy the same prerogative with respect to B that A enjoys; and then A cannot be regarded as the sole cause of B.

Marx and Engels hold that the form of production determines the various phases of history, and is the fundamental cause and the decisive force in social development. This implies no less than the following. To a given mode of production will correspond given institutions and ideas; a change in the mode of production will be accompanied sooner or later, but unerringly and unflinchingly, by a corresponding change in these secondary and derived aspects of civilization; definite institutions and ideas are linked with a definite mode of production, and changes in them cannot occur without a previous reorganization in the mode of production. It also implies that the same mode of production will under any circumstances lead sooner or later to the same institutions and ideas (except for slight modifications), and that the same institutions and ideas always postulate identical modes of production (again, except for slight modifications). It would be futile to urge that the mode of production is the decisive element in the determination of institutions and ideas if the same modes of production coexist in different times and places with different institutions and ideas; if alterations in the other elements of civilization occur without any antecedent alterations in the form of production; and if the same institutions and ideas are found in conjunction with diverse modes of production. In such a case it would be manifest that the mode of production does not determine and is not the basic cause. In such a case other forces as well, or other forces by themselves, exert a transforming influence on human institutions and ideas; and Marx's interpretation does not interpret history, still less does it enable one to predict the future course of social events. True, Marx and Engels themselves ascribe a slight influence to forces other than the mode of production. But this merely allows some slight modification of the institutions and ideas under the same mode of production; or some retardation or acceleration in their changes, once a variation has taken place in production. If the mode of production is ultimately responsible for the remaining aspects of historical pro-

cesses, if it allows only a small effect to other forces, then a rigid connection between it and the institutions and ideas must hold, and only slight modifications, accelerations, or retardations are allowable; but no radical, thoroughgoing deviations.

If this is what Marx's conception stands for, its soundness can be tested by an appeal to history. Marx divides history into four epochs marked by four modes of production, the gens, the slave, the feudal, and the capitalistic. He claims that each mode of production called into existence institutions peculiar to it, and generated particular ideas within the minds of men. He insists further that the dialectic, functioning within each productive régime, alone brought about the evolution of each epoch into the succeeding one. Without calling into question the validity of segmenting economic activity throughout history into these specific categories, let us examine, first, whether there is a definite correspondence between these systems of production on the one hand and institutions and ideas on the other; and second, whether the dialectic behavior of a régime of production is the sole force that causes change and progress in civilization.

Of all the institutions, the state and law are declared to be the most closely connected with the mode of production and the most faithful reflections of it. Let us see what history has to say on this matter.

The gens society has no state in the Marxian sense, because it has no private property, no classes, and no class interests to protect. However, Engels declares that where this form of society persists, as in the Orient, the state arises under the form of despotism.¹ Professor Tozzer indicates that primitive tribal societies have a government, and that, moreover, the government is of widely divergent types.² Despotism ruled in Polynesia; the same form of government prevailed in aboriginal Africa, although democracy was also known; the Iroquois Indians had a democracy; while among the Peruvian Incas the monarchic state held sway, and "In the last years of the empire, the ruler, called the Inca,

¹ *Anti-Dühring*, p. 210.

² *Social Origins and Social Continuities*, pp. 199-211.

was a supreme lord, and his government investigated and controlled every activity of every individual in all the dominion.”¹ Professor Tozzer's comments are:

There is thus no definite and constant correlation between scale of culture and form of government. . . .² The different forms of government thus range all the way from absolute authority vested in one man, through those where leadership is held by one or two persons with powers limited by a council, to communities ruled by a council alone with no central authority, and, finally, to the most informal kind of body made up of the elders or of persons of wealth and position.³

In Ancient Greece and Rome the productive order was based on slavery. Both belonged to the second economic era, according to Marx. We ought to expect, therefore, the same kind of state, the same type of government in both countries. This was not the case. In both there were successions of different forms of government. In Athens hereditary monarchy, the aristocratic and then the democratic republic, despotism (the Thirty Tyrants), and democracy have followed one upon another. It was not in vain that Plato and Aristotle were so admirably familiar with the innermost nature of all forms of government. Rome set out with an elective royalty, went on with an aristocratic and then democratic republic, and ended with the absolute monarchy of the Caesars.⁴ In other words, the same system of production coincides with wide disparities in the organization of the state.

The situation is no different in modern times. The passing of the Middle Ages finds in England a parliamentary régime with guaranties of certain liberties; but in France rigid absolutism is in the saddle; while Germany is a honeycomb of separate small states.⁵ Both in England and in France the monarchic state renders invaluable aid in the thorough establishment of capitalism: witness the unstinted support offered in the process of “original accumulation” (so called by Marx), and the strenuous and enthusiastic promotion of the mercantilist system, proceeding for centuries in both countries. One is led to think, therefore, that

¹ *Social Origins and Social Continuities*, pp. 207-208.

² *Ibid.*, p. 200.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

⁴ A. D. Xénophol, *La théorie de l'histoire*, p. 360.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 360-361.

monarchy is the "necessary" form of state for capitalistic production. But it appears that the state is unsuited to this economic order, and that it nurses its own gravediggers; after a century or two of effort it obtains for its pains the kind of treatment that is symbolized by 1688 in one country and by 1789 in the other.¹

The *Communist Manifesto* acknowledges that, in its onslaughts on capitalism, it takes England as the model in economic development, while in politics France is accepted as the type.² This is strange. A country advanced far enough economically to serve as the "classical example" ought to present the best example also in politics. Why France, backward economically as compared with England, should nevertheless be more typical politically of capitalist society, is difficult to see, if we follow Marx's theory of history as a guide.

Marx and Engels declare more than once that the Revolution of 1688 merely effected in England a compromise between the landed power and the bourgeois class, whereas in France the Revolution of 1789 achieved a complete obliteration of the feudal nobility and a definitive inauguration of the bourgeoisie.³ We should expect, therefore, one type of government in France, eminently suitable to the requirements of the capitalist class so firmly entrenched. However, we find that such is not the case. After the Revolution we see the relapses into the monarchies of Napoleon I, of the Bourbons, of the Orleanists; then the republic, then the monarchy of Napoleon III, and finally the republic once more; we witness the July Revolution of 1830, the February Revolution of 1848, the *coup-d'état* of 1851, the Commune of 1871. No such repeated upturns occurred in England.

Inconsistencies abound even to-day. England and the United States of America are capitalistically mature countries, but their governments show marked differences. France, Italy, and Switzerland are also capitalistic countries, although not so far ad-

¹ Cf. above, p. 148.

² Page 14 n.

³ Marx, *Eighteenth Brumaire*, p. 10. Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, pp. xxiv, 8, 13; preface to the third German edition (1907) of Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*, pp. 3-4.

vanced; yet their governments are not alike. Turkey, Russia, and China are quite behind in their economic development; nevertheless their governments are dissimilar. However, it may be conceded perhaps that in these last few examples the differences in the state present only those slight modifications for which Marx's interpretation allows room.

Law shows the same obstinacy in refusing to confirm Marx's theory. Engels declares that Roman law was a perfect system of law for capitalistic society, and therefore it was suited for adoption, with some modifications, by capitalistic countries. This is a peculiar phenomenon. A society based on the slave régime, as Rome was, institutes laws which are fit for societies at least a thousand years older and two economic eras removed. The law of a society ridden with slave institutions ought to be utterly inadequate for a capitalistic régime, just as capitalism cannot borrow its economic characteristics from a slave society. To mention another instance, England and France are capitalistic countries; both are in the fourth economic era. Yet in the former the common law prevails, with many earmarks of feudalism, while in France civil law furnishes the legal basis. The law does not appear to be very sensitive to the mode of production. It is significant that a jurist like Professor Roscoe Pound entirely omits the economic factor in his *Spirit of the Common Law*, and severely criticises Marx's view that law is merely a reflection of economic conditions.¹

Let us now consider religion, which Marx and Engels acknowledge to be an institution remote from the economic basis yet sensitively correlated with it. Precisely what cataclysmic transformations occurred in the mode of production of ancient Judea to give birth to Christianity, a religion that has had a transcendental influence on the history of man? And what new mode of production arrived in Arabia to issue in one of the few great world religions and to launch Islam on one of the most astonishing careers of conquest and expansion the world has ever seen? History fails to tell. Protestantism, especially Calvinism, is pronounced by our two philosophers as the religion *par excellence* of capitalism.

¹ *Interpretations of Legal History*, chapt. 5.

If so, why did the Reformation begin in sixteenth-century Germany, which was strongly feudal, as Engels well knows,¹ and not in the most capitalistically developed country in Europe? Venice had her quarrels with the Pope; yet Calvinism took root in backward Scotland and not in this highly commercial city. France was Catholic under feudalism; it is not Protestant under capitalism. The same is true of Italy, of Spain, and of other countries. France, Italy, and Spain are Catholic; Finland, Holland, and Scandinavia are Protestant. Is there any fundamental discrepancy in the mode of production in these two groups of countries? Is the latter group more capitalistic than the former? The United States of America is capitalistic; yet there is no one religion corresponding to or "reflecting" this economic basis. It has a welter of religions, creeds, and sects. Switzerland is capitalistic, so is Germany; but neither has a uniform religion. The Jews are as capitalistic in England as the English, and as capitalistic in France as the French; yet they are neither Protestant nor Catholic. Protestant missionaries find converts among backward tribes in Africa and Asia. Are these converts first transmuted into capitalists and then supplied with a religion their capitalistic interests are clamoring for? ²

When we turn to ideas as distinct from institutions, we discover that they, too, seem to be fairly independent of the mode of production. Take philosophy, for example. The theory runs that philosophy is a tissue of absurdities and mystifications; that it flourishes only as long as man does not possess a full understanding of the ramifications of every branch of knowledge and of its interrelations with the whole scheme of the universe; that philosophy is short-lived and is doomed to extinction as soon as a wider grasp is gained of the nature and interconnections of phenomena about us. It should follow, according to such a view, that philosophy ought to flourish in economically backward coun-

¹ Engels, *The Mark*, pp. 109-113, reprinted as an appendix in his *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*.

² In this case, too, it would hardly be pertinent to cite against Marx examples of divergent religious denominations, such as the Methodist, the Baptist, the Congregational, existing under the same form of production. Such examples doubtlessly present minor variations for which Marx's theory makes allowance.

tries, where the environment is as yet incomprehensible to man and uncontrollable by him, and that it — philosophy — ought to evaporate in economically advanced countries, where man has won a fuller understanding of the forces around him and a more conscious and firmer control over them. But history demonstrates that this is not the case. Rome was not, according to the testimony of Marx and Engels, as many-sided and as fully developed in economic enterprise as Greece was; yet Rome could not boast of greater achievements in philosophy. Backward Turkey, or China, or Russia never succeeded in deluging the intellectual market with philosophical output. Germany and France are more advanced, and the understanding of social and natural phenomena is more pronounced there; but philosophy always flourished there and is hardly languishing at present. England and the United States of America are highly capitalistic countries, but in philosophy they will not cede the place to backward Spain or undeveloped Mongolia.

Thus an appeal to history shows that it refuses to wear the strait-jacket which Marx and Engels would put upon it, and that it is no respecter of systems of production. The same form of production is found with varieties of institutions and ideas, and the same institutions and ideas thrive under different forms of production. If the mode of production is at bottom the all-powerful cause, if it overrides all obstacles in asserting its sovereignty, if nothing else counts except as a slight modification, retardation, or acceleration — then each system of production ought to present essentially the same aggregate of institutions and ideas in any country and at any time. Any society based on slavery ought to enjoy the same institutions and the same development of art and science that Greece did. Any feudal society, be it feudal Japan or Russia, is to furnish the same phases of civilization as any other such society, *e. g.*, France. And any one capitalistic society must exhibit the same cultural development as any other, for example, England. But history laughs at all this. History fails to approve when Marx teaches Proudhon that “The same men who establish social relations conformably with their material productivity, produce also the principles, the ideas, the categories,

conformably with their social relations.”¹ And how hollow and helpless sounds Engels’s dogma: “. . . the economic structure of society always furnishes the real basis, starting from which we can alone work out the ultimate explanation of the whole superstructure of juridical and political institutions as well as of the religious, philosophical, and other ideas of a given historical period.”²

As history fails to disclose persistent correlation between the mode of production and the other phases of civilization, so also it demonstrates that the dynamic forces working for change and progress in society do not proceed in the manner that Marx prescribes. Marx urges that the dialectic processes generate within each mode of production elements antagonistic to it and cultivate the germs of the succeeding order; and that the class struggle, working in unison with the dialectic, consummates the new synthesis. History, however, suggests that this dialectic behaves in singular fashion. The dialectic is a fitful, uncertain, capricious force which knows no regularity or uniformity. Now it works speedily, then slowly, and at certain periods it stops altogether. Here it effects progressive change, and there it merely brings about the periodical recurrence of the same events, leading to no upward development. At different periods and in different places it works in different ways, with different rapidity, and with different effects. It does not manifest itself as a natural process, with steady regularity, without discrimination against particular historical epochs, and without favor to special geographical areas.

During the long ages before the advent of civilization changes did occur, yet the Marxian dialectic was at a standstill, and class struggle was unknown. The dominant cause of social transformations was not the mode of production, but the organization of the family and significant alterations within it, as Engels urges in the *Origin of the Family*. All peoples begin, according to him and

¹ Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 119.

² Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. 41.

Marx, with a gens organization, with primitive communism;¹ but their evolution toward higher stages does not go on at the same rate. Marx and Engels cite the Slavs and the Asiatic peoples as perennial examples of the gens order: "The old tribal communistic forms . . . may last thousands of years, as is seen in the case of the Indians² and Slavs to-day."³ Our two authors do not explain, however, the causes which send some people on the path of progress, while holding others chained in a rut. China and India are much older than England. If it is true that the mode of production and its dialectic are the all-dominant forces in history, these two old countries should have traversed long ago the various economic stages, and should at present revel in socialism, holding to the rest of the world the mirror in which it could see the glories that await it in the future. Yet England is far on the road of economic growth, while in these two older countries the dialectic went to sleep. The American Indians, I presume, began their career in the world as early as the Europeans. Why did they not develop economically as fast as the Europeans? Why did a European Columbus discover America, and why did not an Indian Columbus discover Europe? It is not clear why the dynamic, dialectic forces should be so energetic in America after 1620 and in Western Europe, but so sluggish in America before 1620 and in Asia.

In a similar manner, the dialectic favors Western Christendom and labors enthusiastically for it, but discriminates against the Mohammedan world. Engels relates that in Islam religious uprisings spring from economic soil and are essentially economic movements enwrapped in religion. But these uprisings, he says, fail to effect progress: they do not uproot the old order and establish a higher one; they merely represent periodical recurrences on the same level of economic development. It is different, he points out, with the uprisings in the Christian West. There, too, in

¹ The view that primitive society is organized on the "gens" basis or on the communistic basis is not held by modern anthropologists. See, for example, *Primitive Society* by R. H. Lowie.

² *I. e.*, Hindoos.

³ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 179. "In Asia . . . conditions of production . . . are reproduced with the regularity of natural phenomena." *Capital*, vol. i, 158.

popular movements religion serves merely as a cloak for assaults on antiquated economic systems; but the collisions are successful in extirpating the old régime and in instituting a new one; and thus "the world moves onward."¹ Finally, Marx and Engels assure us that ultimately the dialectic comes to a dead stop, that class struggles are abolished, and that transitions to new systems become unknown. Such a situation will prevail under socialism. The reason for this thorough paralysis of the dynamic agency in history is hardly evident.

In general, the dialectic is in their hands not an objective and precise manner of regarding social evolution, but rather a pliable and obedient plaything, employed at will and manipulated to yield a desired result. It is an irresponsible makeshift serving to accommodate any purpose. "The confusion of the Marxian philosophic notions will not be strange to him who knows what can be done by means of the Hegelian dialectic, or rather what cannot be done," says Dühring, to the great dissatisfaction of Engels.² Anything can be proved dialectically if one is a deft hand at perceiving theses and antitheses lying about loose, no matter how remote in point of time or how irrelevant to the issue under consideration. It is the philosopher's stone which lends a respectable mien to conclusions that cannot be supported by logic or enforced by factual evidence. Is it necessary to prove scientifically and conclusively that socialism is coming? Very easy. Announce it as the necessary outcome of the inevitable synthesis toward which the inexorable dialectic is moving irresistibly in its relentless historical march.

Engels has one such proof, and Marx has another. Engels teaches that all peoples begin their historical course with common property. This is the thesis. Then arrives the régime of private property under slavery, feudalism, capitalism. This is the antithesis. The synthesis will appear in the future in the guise of socialism, which reestablishes communal proprietorship, but on a higher level than the primitive communism.³ According to

¹ *Neue Zeit*, vol. xiii, no. 1 (1894-1895), p. 5 n.

² Quoted by Engels in his *Anti-Dühring*, p. 160.

³ *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 169-170.

this way of looking at things, socialism should have followed upon ancient slavery, which was a régime of private property, and therefore the legitimate antithesis to the communism of the gens. The synthesis should have followed directly upon the negation of the thesis, and should have spared the world feudalism and capitalism. Marx has another dialectic argument to support the same contention, for he sees another thesis and antithesis scattered at large. With him the thesis is represented by the latter Middle Ages, when the means of production were owned by the direct producer, when the peasant possessed the land he cultivated and the artisan owned the tools. The negation of this thesis came with capitalism, which divorced the laborer from the means of production, and which, instead, gradually concentrated them in the hands of a few idle exploiters. Then will arrive the negation of this negation, and this must be socialism, which will effect a restitution of all property to the immediate producers of wealth by establishing an order based on the coöperative association of free laborers.¹

The same irresponsibility is shown when the country is to be chosen where the dialectic will first strike its mighty blow in behalf of the socialistic society. According to Marx, France will only "proclaim" the problem of the proletariat by providing the theater where the class struggle bursts out flames subsequently into a world war in which all nations are embroiled. But it is England where the problem is solved, for during this world conflagration the English proletariat is driven to supreme power in its country.² Engels's choice, however, is Germany. It is there that the workers will win the victory over capitalism; then the other countries will follow.³ Marx reproaches Proudhon with juggling with "contradictions," and calls such performances "scientific charlatanism." Marx was more critical toward others than toward himself and Engels.⁴

§. How inadequate the dialectic is as a clue to social evolution can be demonstrated by the failure of Marx's and Engels's predictions

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 835-837.

² *Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich*, p. 85.

³ *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. xxxviii.

⁴ *Poverty of Philosophy*, appendix, p. 202.

concerning the time of the arrival of socialism. The *Communist Manifesto* (page 58) stated that Germany was on the eve of a bourgeois revolution which would be "the prelude to an immediately following proletarian revolution." Before the decade was over Germany saw some upheavals, but the proletarian revolution failed to follow immediately or in the seventy-five years since. In 1850 Marx prophesied that with the next industrial crisis a new revolution would break out in Europe, and he added that the one was just as certain to come as the other.¹ Since that time more than half a dozen crises have occurred, but none of them has brought on any revolutionary cataclysm. In 1885 Engels expected in the near future a political shake-up in Europe, basing his prediction on the fact that in the nineteenth century a revolution occurred within every fifteen or eighteen years, as in 1815, 1830, 1848-52, 1870.² But no such shake-up came. In 1886 he saw that the decennial cycles of industry which had run their course from 1825 to 1867 had ultimately culminated in England in a "permanent and chronic depression." He prognosticates that "The sighed-for period of prosperity will not come," and warns that "we can almost calculate the moment when the unemployed, losing patience, will take their own fate into their own hands."³ Four decades have passed since that augury, and England has seen several periods of prosperity and at least three severe crises, but there has been no proletarian outbreak.

The dialectic provides for its two promoters no basis for predictions, because it exhibits no objective uniformities, no regular sequences on which alone a law of development could be built. Marx and Engels were full of expectancy, saw "signs" in every event of more than ordinary significance, were obsessed with ideas of swift dialectic upturns, and every historical ripple looked to them like a titanic billow and as the harbinger of revolution. Marx saw an impending revolution when he noticed the electric locomotive on exhibition in London, and he was so enthusiastic about it that poor Liebknecht caught the contagion and dreamed

¹ *Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich*, p. 102. Cf. p. 9.

² Quoted by Kautsky, *Der Weg zur Macht*, p. 17.

³ *Capital*, vol. i, preface, p. 31.

the whole night about the fall of capitalism and the arrival of the millennium. When the chartist movement gained momentum, Marx hailed it as the promise of a new day, and glorified its adherents as the champions of new systems. When the labor organizations attained a measure of solidity in England, he saw in the trade-unions the nursery of the class struggle that would bring to the world the dawn of a new era. The Communist uprising in Paris during the Franco-Prussian war he treated as a phenomenon of exquisite historical dignity, regarded it as an event of gigantic significance, and instructed the proletarians to follow it in many ways as a model in their final clashes with the bourgeoisie. Engels, too, always sees the "eve of a revolution," sure victory in the "near future," and always hears the successor of capitalism knocking at the door.¹ There is truth in Simon Patten's verdict that "Marx was a bad theorist and a worse prophet."²

History fails to establish persistent correlation between the modes of production and the secondary, derived aspects of social life. It offers ample evidence that the dialectic process laboring within the mode of production does not proceed in a uniform and therefore predictable manner, but shows perplexing irregularities, and is utterly inadequate to account for the course of historical evolution. It awakens the suspicion that the dialectic is merely a makeshift, a mystification, and not a reliable theory of societal development. The materialistic interpretation is incapable of interpreting history. The reason for the failure is obvious. It simplifies matters that are exceedingly complex. It has a narrow one-sided view of life. Notwithstanding their professed belief that all things are mutually interrelated, Marx and Engels regard the phenomena of civilization as a string of events linked in cause and effect relationships, as a development proceeding in a rectilinear manner. They establish a hierarchy of social phenomena; assign to the mode of production the place of honor as the initial, independent factor; and appoint it to serve as the ruling cause of all the rest. But history is not so simple as this. It presents a

¹ *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 129, 183, 180.

² *Reconstruction of Economic Theory*, p. 24.

bewildering complexity of elements, all mutually interdependent, all influencing each other in various subtle ways, and all amalgamating into one whole. Social life is one. It is only when the human mind attempts to understand its manifestations that it dissevers the elements. To understand the workings of a mechanism or of an organism, analysis must be undertaken. And analysis discloses the fact that there is not only one force that explains all civilization but a great variety of forces, and that spiritual agencies are not to cede their place of importance to economic agencies.

The adherents of Marx have a singular way of acting at this point. They retort that he cannot be accused of ignoring the non-economic forces in history, because he acknowledged that they play a part. This is not the point at issue. That Marx accorded some influence to spiritual elements is not denied. The only question is whether he recognized that they have an independent origin and an importance at par with the economic elements; or whether he regarded them as mere emanations from the economic subsoil, and granted them the subordinate function of only accelerating or retarding or slightly modifying the workings of the mode of production. The latter is the fact. To Marx the form of production is the all-dominant agency in history, an agency that acknowledges no rivals. Now an appeal to history discloses the fact that this way of looking at things is inadequate. When the Eskimos are at the same stage of development at which they were ages ago; when religions like Christianity and Mohammedanism come into existence without antecedent alteration in the mode of production in the countries involved; when a régime of slavery yields in Athens a Plato and Aristotle, a Sophocles and Phidias, and a marvelous blossoming out of civilization in general, but exhibits no such manifestations in contemporaneous Sparta or with any other nation under a similar economic régime; when India and China are thousands of years older than the European countries, but are vastly behindhand in economic development — we are not witnessing slight modifications of effects produced by the system of production and its dialectic; we are rather dealing with evidence of the sustained operation of other forces which, in

defiance of the mode of production and its dialectic, consistently produce results of their own. Marx's theory is impotent to account for historical processes, and the reason is that he failed to ascribe sufficient weight to the many non-economic agencies in history.

CHAPTER XVI

THE NARROWNESS OF THE THEORY

It is not the purpose here to give an account of all the forces at work in society. The aim is not to offer a philosophy of history destined to compete with Marx's theory. An analysis and synthesis of the elements involved in social evolution would require superhuman powers. Some logicians, of whom Rickert is probably the best representative, maintain that historical laws are, in the nature of the case, an impossibility.

The historian, Rickert explains, deals with empirical reality, with particular events that have occurred in the past and that do not repeat themselves. The concepts he employs, while general, have yet a specific content, and serve as a means of grasping an individual phenomenon. Out of the vast multitude of facts, and out of the unlimited manifoldness of the details of each fact, he singles out those facts and those details which are significant for the total situation under scrutiny; in other words, the selection is based on a standard of values and judgments. The causal connection between the assembled data, and their change and evolution, can indeed be established; but the idea of historical laws is a *contradictio in adjecto*. The case is different in natural science, where the concepts are general and devoid of specific reference to a phenomenon that had occurred in a definite time and place, and in which, on that account, a causal relation is at once a generalization, a "law." Reality regarded from the standpoint of the general is nature; reality regarded from the standpoint of the particular and the unique is history.¹

However, a few tentative suggestions and remarks will be undertaken, not in the way of proposing a coördinated view of history, but rather with the purpose of illustrating and emphasizing

¹ *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*, chap. I, sect. I; chap. 2, sect. II; chap. 4, sect. II and III; and *passim*. Menger, Dilthey, and Windelband have similar views.

how lightly Marx considered the problem, with what serious omissions his theory can be charged, and why even a superficial appeal to history shows that his conception of social life is inadequate.

One of the agencies that cannot be omitted in a sketch of the elements that mold the life of societies is the geographical environment. Marx recognizes this factor; but he does not stress sufficiently the various aspects of its economic influence, while of its non-economic effects he loses sight altogether.

He makes nature an integral part of a mode of production; but thereby the economic significance of this force is by no means exhausted. A definite combination of certain geographical phenomena will provide the possibility for a civilization; will give direction to the occupations, modes of living, and interests of the people; and will offer facilities, or obstacles, for economic development. Fertile plains, rivers, and a warm climate invite settlement; steppes produce roving nomads; the arctic and tropical lands find checks to all progress; islands, peninsulas, and territories with a long coast line turn people's energies to seafaring, to trading, to daring adventures, bring them in contact with other peoples, and make them cosmopolitan and versatile. Rivers, valleys, and mountain passes create natural routes along which commerce flows. People living on highlands have different occupations, habits, and traits from those inhabiting the lowlands. Egypt was the gift of the Nile, the Tigris and Euphrates were cradles of ancient civilizations; Athens and Carthage, the Venetians and the British, were encouraged to turn to trade and colonization. The Tartars, the Eskimos, the Hindoos, the Arabs were all influenced in many respects by their natural surroundings.

The non-economic effects of geographical conditions are of no smaller moment in history. Ancient civilization grew up in Egypt and Mesopotamia, not only because of the fertility and the climate with which those lands were endowed, but also because the neighboring desert and sea, the steppes and the marshes afforded excellent protection from the inroads of strangers, and promised security and peace. Lands hemmed in by mountains breed

liberty-loving, hardy people; but while protecting the dwellers from hostile intruders, keep them in isolation and shut off from communication with other worlds. The many peninsulas and mountains divided ancient Greece into numerous small states, and created the opportunity for disunion, fatal quarrels, and lack of coöperation at crucial periods. The forests of old Russia rendered communication exceedingly difficult, and led to scattered settlements; this circumstance helps explain why many loosely connected states arose, warring with one another through centuries for supremacy.

On the other hand, countries on plateaus, or with many rivers, have facilities of communication and mutual intercourse, rendering the people homogeneous and unified. Rivers and valleys largely determine the direction of migrations and invasions; and frequently geographical location exposes regions to great dangers. The Rhine, the Rhone, and the Danube are associated with long histories of warfare and movements of populations. Russia lay on the route of the wandering Tartars, and she became subjected to their yoke for long years in the Middle Ages, while serving as a bulwark for Western Europe. This at least partly accounts for the retarded development of the country. Similarly, the central plain that is now Germany, lying as it does in everybody's way, was the logical theater of almost all the dramas enacted in peninsular Europe. From the time of the Roman Empire onward it was continually exposed to influences from all sides. The stirrings proceeding from the East and Asia Minor, from the northern seas and from the civilized lands to the west and south, left varied traces on this much-buffed land. On the other hand, Great Britain, for long on the road to nowhere, was spared many an invasion, and was more than once left in peace, while the Continent resounded with the echoes of the battle-axes and shook to its foundations with turmoil and strife. The effect of nature on human character, on religion, art, and literature, may be mentioned; but such points are highly controversial.

The idea is frequently entertained that natural conditions are significant only in the primitive stage of a people's history, but sink into unimportance in the later historical experiences, when

man learns how to overcome his environment; that they constitute a stationary and passive factor, and therefore cannot promote change and development. It is doubtful whether this view is wholly correct. True, as time goes on and man accumulates knowledge, he emancipates himself to an increasing degree from the fetters imposed on him by the geographical environment. Nevertheless, throughout the history of a people the natural factor is an ever-present element to reckon with, both in its economic and in its non-economic potency. The natural surroundings aid in laying out some of the main fields of activity of a people, direct its interests in definite channels, create abiding contiguities with other peoples and therefore permanent contacts and occasional opportunities for friction. These activities, interests, and contiguities propagate other interests and activities, send repercussions on various other phases of life, and call for constant adjustment, for ever-recurring policies, and for continual changes in social conduct. Persistent motives and incentives, lasting fears and ambitions are thus called into existence, and they may dominate a nation in all its history.

The fact that England is close to France and is on the sea is a constant factor indeed; yet, like a red thread, it runs through her history. It drew her into devious entanglements and into interminable wars with France throughout the Middle Ages. With the discovery of the ocean, consequent upon the search for new routes to the Indies, a new career was opened to her. Surrounded by sea, having bred worthy and adventurous seamen, and having whetted her interest in seafaring, she was ambitious to become a sea power. Hence the wars, running intermittently for centuries, with her successive or simultaneous rivals, Spain, Holland, France. The acquisition of colonies brought new interests and added new tasks to the far-flung empire. Distant possessions must be defended, their neighbors must be constantly watched and played against one another; there are adjustments to make with colonies, and troubles to settle with the recalcitrant ones among them; scattered dependencies call for more merchant marines, for naval armaments, and these in turn require naval bases, distant ports, control of strategic positions here and there.

The result is a whole network of treaties, understandings, jealousies, rivalries, policies, and interests, with threads reaching everywhere. These facts do not fill the whole history of Great Britain, but they form part of it; nor are they due solely to the geographic influence, but they are doubtlessly due partly to it.

On the other hand, the geographical position of Russia filled her with the ambition to cut a "window" to Western Europe; and, bereft of good connections with the sea, she tried for ages to get close to it, now through the Baltic, now through the Dardanelles, now through the Persian Gulf, now in the Far East. These attempts had much to do with no few aspects of European and Asiatic history. Had the geography of ancient Greece been different; had she possessed extensive, fertile plains, long navigable rivers, and no mountains; had she been removed far inland, who doubts that her history would have been different in many important respects? Examples can be multiplied.¹

Moreover, natural conditions do not remain constant. Resources are exhausted, and scientific discoveries bring heretofore neglected and non-usable wealth into prominence. Diminishing returns create enduring problems in old countries, and fears and appropriate policies concerning the future in the younger countries. When coal and petroleum become scarce in the advanced countries, those still abounding in such resources, China or Russia, for instance, will gain an advantageous position in economic development. When coal and petroleum become everywhere extinct, the race will face new problems. Man will have to learn how to utilize the sun's energy, or will be compelled to adapt himself to the tropics, where the sun delivers the energy willingly in the form of vegetation; or else, science will be compelled to devise other ways of enabling man to thrive. Ellsworth Huntington advances the thesis that climate does not remain the same, but is subject to cyclical changes occurring simultaneously over very large portions of the globe. He maintains that the periodical re-

¹ Excellent discussions of the influence of the geographic environment will be found in the following books: P. Vidal de la Blache, *Principles of Human Geography* (tr. by M. T. Bingham, New York, 1926); F. Ratzel, *Anthropogeographie*, parts I and II (Stuttgart, 1882 and 1891), and *Politische Geographie* (München and Berlin, 1923).

currence of a low rainfall and the consequent diminution of the crops resulted in the past in enhanced pressure of populations on subsistence, stirred up political discontent and strife, and started waves of migration that led to great collisions among nations and to mixtures of races. He suggests that these "pulsatory" climatic changes were chiefly responsible for some of the outstanding events in history. They propelled the migrations which ultimately overwhelmed Rome, incited the Tartar invasions from Asia in the Middle Ages, and brought on the plagues of the sixth and seventh centuries and the Black Death of 1346.¹

Marx and Engels are aware of the potency of geographic surroundings. Marx explains that the backwardness of the German manufactures before 1850 was due to the "unfavorable geographical situation of the country, at a distance from the Atlantic," which was the highway of the world's trade, and to the incessant wars fought on German soil since the sixteenth century.² Engels ascribes the main cause of the divergence in the development of the Old and the New Worlds since the days of barbarism, to the difference of resources in tamable animals and in cultivable species of grain.³ In one of his last letters he concedes that it would be ridiculous to attempt to explain economically the origin of the permutation of the consonants in "high German," for the real cause was the geographic division of the country formed by the mountains that cut across Germany.⁴ But these are isolated instances. The trend of our argument is not to the effect that the two writers are completely ignorant of the geographic influences. One can easily assume that they were familiar with such facts. The contention is that they fail to elaborate on such facts, to establish uniformities of causally related sequences, and to amalgamate the uniformities with their theory of history. The contention is that they pay surprisingly little attention to those economic effects which are produced by natural surroundings quite apart from the instrumentality of the mode of production; and

¹ "Changes of Climate and History," *American Historical Review*, vol. xviii, 213-232.

² *Revolution and Counter Revolution*, p. 18.

³ *Origin of the Family*, pp. 30, 193.

⁴ Reprinted in A. Labriola's *Socialisme et philosophie*, p. 243.

that, with the exception of some casual remarks, the non-economic results flowing from geographical conditions they neglect completely.

But the natural environment alone is not a builder of civilization and not a promoter of progress. It supplies merely the raw material and furnishes incentives and motives. What is shaped with this raw material, and what the response is to the incentives, depends on the character of the creatures that find themselves in contact with nature. The beasts of the forest had started out amid the same natural conditions as man. Yet the beasts made no history, while man built a civilization. "The measure of this difference," says Professor Shailer Mathews, "is the measure of non-economic, personal forces."¹ The traits that differentiate man from the beast are powerful factors in history; and it may be stated, in general, that the two primary elements of social development are the geographical conditions and certain dominant and distinctive traits of human nature.

These two agencies, the raw material and changes in it on the one hand, and the molder, the reacting agent, on the other, are the two initial, original forces which, working one upon another, make history and create civilizations. If we are to descend below them, we may as well begin with the primordial cell. Subtract the specific traits of human nature, and the mode of production remains inert and helpless; and the dialectic goes to sleep. Beasts and birds pursue modes of production just as man does. Beavers build dwellings; foxes hunt, fish, and contrive ingenious homes; birds make interesting nests. They all have methods of providing the essentials of their existence. But no progress is to be discerned in these methods; and their modes of production erect no institutions, formulate no ideologies, and write no history. This is so, because beasts and birds lack those traits which man possesses and which insist on doing something with a productive system and on waking up the dialectic and putting it to work. The modes of life and the activities of other animals are nature-imposed biological processes, results of evolution through measureless ages, and fixed for geologic epochs. Man, too, has a certain sphere

¹ *Spiritual Interpretation of History*, p. 39.

of unalterable actions prescribed for him by nature; but in addition, she bestowed on him endowments which emancipate him from the doom of remaining in the same enchanted circle, and which open to him realms of new adventures and possibilities forever closed, apparently, to other creatures.

The first and most important trait that separates the human species from the other species of animals is the superior intelligence of man. The mutation, or whatever else it was, that granted the human being a better mind to work with is a phenomenon of foremost significance in the history and analysis of civilization. It singled man out from among the other animals, tore him away from the life of inertia and vegetation, and sent him on the upward path of progress.¹ What intelligence is, in essence, what it consists of, and what it does and does not do, psychologists, metaphysicians, and philosophers may well argue, disagree, and confess ignorance about. But the incontestable fact stands out that man is endowed with an intelligence superior to that of other creatures.

Marx and Engels frequently talk as if all the mind does, with the vast majority of people, is to absorb reality, which reflects itself in the head and transforms itself into ideas. Such a notion is as vague as it is inadequate. How reality "reflects" itself, what goes on in the head, how a fragment of experience transmigrates into an idea, is not made clear. If it is all so simple, why is it not true of other animals? Engels insists that all our ideas are copies of reality. Before people, he says, could obtain an idea of a cylinder they must have seen rectangles revolve about an axis. True, the ultimate source of ideas is the world of actuality. But this does not mean that each idea is a shadow, a photograph of facts. Ideas accumulate very largely by a process that only an intelligence not possessed by the beast can undertake. Many ideas grow out from those previously accumulated. One aggregate of ideas will give rise to another without the intervention of external facts. If the cylinder is a result of direct experience, the determinant, the differential equations, the functions of real and

¹ C. A. Ellwood, "Theories of Cultural Evolution," *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. xxiii, 779-800.

complex variables are not mere "reflections" of reality. Henry Poincaré is right when he says: "The genesis of mathematical discovery is a problem which must inspire the psychologist with the keenest interest. For this is the process in which the human mind seems to borrow least from the exterior world."¹

Man's mind is not an absorbing sponge, and his intelligence transcends that of the beast. He possesses keen observation; ability to investigate, to compare and contrast; and powers of discerning the essential features, the soul of facts. He is capable of forming abstractions and concepts, of analyzing and synthesizing, of reasoning by deduction, and of attaining generalizations on the basis of repeated observations. This capacity to think and to arrive at general formulas and laws provides two potent economizing agencies that aid him incalculably in his struggle with nature. Thought economizes effort: it banishes the necessity of having recourse on each occasion to trial and error methods, with the consequent waste of labor and resources. The accumulation of principles and laws economizes thought: once derived, they render invaluable service wherever they can be applied, releasing man from the compulsion of going through afresh, in each instance, the laborious and complicated processes of thought which would guide his action. Economy is as important in the spiritual realms as it is in the sphere of the production of commodities. In a sense, economy is the aim in all the provinces of human activity and interests.

This superior intelligence is a supreme weapon in man's hands. Most animals depend on nature to endow them directly with the means of protection and with the instruments indispensable in the struggle for existence — mimicry, swift legs, secretions, odors, change of fur. Man is not so dependent. Because of intelligence, his adaptation to the environment is not passive but aggressive. He reacts to nature with his mind, shapes it to suit his needs, and while obeying its laws, turns it more and more into a servant obedient to his designs. Because of intelligence, man's evolution, since remote primitive days, has taken a turn which is at sharp variance with animal evolution. Instead of the adapta-

¹ *Science and Method*, p. 46. Cf. p. 36.

tion of the organism to the natural environment, human evolution began to connote the development and progress of institutions and ideas. Human evolution is no longer biological; it is social, institutional, intellectual. Subtract intelligence, and nature will hold man, too, in thralldom, as it holds the animals; and the mode of production will help man make history just as little as the mode of production prevalent among the beasts helps them.

A discussion of intelligence by no means exhausts the dominant features of man's nature. Many other distinctive traits and dispositions are of paramount consequence in the social processes that form the content of history and civilization. Emulation, rivalry, inventiveness, sympathy, and the whole range of emotions and feelings demand careful consideration. But they cannot be taken up here. It must also be added that the distinctive psychological traits of man will not account fully for the disparity between his achievements and those of other creatures. The difference in his physical structure is also to be kept in mind. His supple, prehensile hand and his erect posture rendered great assistance in his development and in his accomplishments.

The geographical environment and man, with his intelligence and other traits, are the primary and basic factors of history. The mode of production cannot rank with them, because it is a derived phenomenon. Indeed, some method of gaining a livelihood had to be pursued by man as soon as he appeared on the globe; but this method is a purely biological, mechanical process imposed by nature, and strictly analogous to the ways in which other animals manage to subsist. His most primitive ways of procuring food are not remote from the rudimentary reflexes, tropisms, and instinctive movements of the animal; while the mode of production upheld by Marx and Engels as the cause of history and civilization is a far more advanced phenomenon. It is a resultant of the deliberate action of man's intelligence on his environment; it is a derived and not an original, autonomous datum.

Among the factors that emanate from the fundamental elements, man and nature, and that are preëminent in governing the

course of history, two deserve attention even in a cursory sketch — religion and science. That religion is an independent force, because its genesis cannot be ascribed to production, Marx and Engels well recognize. With them, as will be recollected, the fountainhead of religion is identified with the propensity of the human being to search for an explanation and for an understanding of the phenomena about him, and to mystify and clothe with supernatural attributes those appearing to him as enigmas and as inexorable. They treat religion with contempt, and consider it as a conglomeration of barbarous and fantastic notions, amassed by primitive man, transmitted in modified forms to the later generations, and employed throughout the ages by the exploiting classes to bemuddle the minds of the lowly. Under socialism, they announce gleefully, religion will become extinct, because all natural and social phenomena will be transparent, and there will remain no more mysteries to tantalize mankind. Such views merely demonstrate how narrow and superficial their promulgators could at times be, and how casually they disposed of some of the most profound questions of social science. It may also be observed that, according to this very theory, religion ought to possess a long lease of a prosperous existence. As civilization advances, the provinces of the unknown hardly display a tendency to shrink. The more we search, the more problems we solve, the more “laws” we discover — the more we appreciate how boundless is the domain of fundamental secrets yet to be unveiled. The microscope and the spectroscope, calculus and evolution, the principle of the transformation of energy and the concept of law in science, have released more hosts of unexplained things and have wakened vastly more vexing questions than ever perturbed the savage mind. “The progress of science,” observed Alfred Marshall, “while increasing the stock of knowledge, increases also the area of conscious ignorance.”¹

While they acknowledge the remoteness of religion from economic soil and the independence of its origin, they treat it, in its fortunes through history, as a mere shadow of economic phenomena and as an element playing a meager part in civilization.

¹ *Industry and Trade*, p. 657.

In this they are wrong. Whatever the truth about the ultimate origin of religion, — animism, magic, or this or the other psychological tendency of man, — religion remains a powerful factor in the private lives of most people.

Even Professor Haeckel, who sees nothing in the universe and man except matter, with its physics and chemistry, who vigorously attacks all faith and mysticism, who gravely discountenances all belief in the dualism of matter and spirit, and passionately decries and derides the religious delusions and fancies of a personal God, an immortal soul, a life to come, and other supernatural forces "unknown and inadmissible to science," even Haeckel realizes the inescapable fact that religion is a perennially vital agency in the life of man. And he proceeds to elaborate his "monistic religion," with the "three goddesses," — the true, the good, and the beautiful, — which he would like to recommend as a substitute for present religious beliefs.¹

As in the private life of an individual, so in the collective life of society. Religion does not function as the pale image of production, but as an agency active on its own account. In ages past it served as the center from which the animating, inspiring force of social life radiated; it was the driving spring of art, literature, architecture, and of many social interests and functions. It is perhaps the all-absorbing element in the life of primitive and even of more advanced peoples. The history and the destinies of China and India, of the ancient Hebrews and Greeks, can be understood much better if we seek to learn the part that religion played with these peoples. That Christianity had a transforming influence in history, not many would care to dispute. In the Middle Ages religion colored every phase of human endeavor and exerted no inconsiderable effect on economic life. It spread education, preserved learning, and nursed intellectual interests. Art, science, industry, politics, and civic activities were all held together by their common subordination to a spiritual ideal. It was religion and religious fanaticism that galvanized the Saracens and inspired them to invasions and conquests which resulted in a long train of historic events. Undoubtedly love of adventure and eco-

¹ *The Riddle of the Universe*, chap. 18, also p. 301.

conomic incentives played their parts in the Crusades; but perhaps just as undoubtedly the religious motive was a dominant cause.

Then consider the Protestant Reformation, which for two hundred years and more stirred Europe to its profoundest depths, arraying nation against nation and state against state; exciting war and cruelty, secession and disaffection; and leaving no interest, spiritual or material, social or individual, unmolested. There is much in Professor Shailer Mathews' assertion that, had it not been for the religious convictions of the seventeenth-century religious leaders, history "would have taken a very different turn. We might never have had the Dutch Republic, the Puritan Commonwealth, the colony of Massachusetts Bay, the Social Contract, the French Revolution, or the Hohenzollerns in Prussia."¹

While the control religion holds over economic activity is not as ostensible, persistent, and unified in modern times as it was in the Middle Ages, it is nevertheless true that religion has not been inert. To cite a few instances, Protestantism contributed a good deal toward the upbuilding of modern capitalism, as investigations of men like the regretted Max Weber, Professor Sombart, R. H. Tawney, and others demonstrate; the expulsion of the Huguenots was not without economic consequences for France and other parts of the world; the Spanish Inquisition hardly failed to result in unfavorable repercussions on the economic development of Spain; and before the past century, the backwardness of Germany in economic growth was due in no small degree to the acrimonious religious wars that had been fought on her soil.

These historical allusions do not prove, as Marx would have it, that religion is merely the servant carrying out the mandates of the economic master; they rather tend to demonstrate that religion is a powerful stream achieving tremendous results, alone or in conjunction with economic and other streams; that it is a force, now enhancing or attenuating, now submerging or deranging, economic as well as other forces.

While religion endures as a factor to be reckoned with, one may assert without hesitation that, in modern days, science has come to the forefront as a molder of civilization. Marx and Engels are

¹ Mathews, *Spiritual Interpretation of History*, p. 61.

aware of this. Science, they acknowledge, is indispensable in the progress of production and in man's endeavors to subdue nature. They expect science to contribute a good deal in perfecting the future socialistic régime and in bringing upon mankind all the blessings which that glorious order promises. But their attitude toward science is the direct opposite of their attitude toward religion. They acknowledge an independent origin for religion, but deny it any basic effects upon the course of history. In the case of science, they are aware of its paramount significance, but deny it an independent existence. Science, to them, is but a reflex of the systems of production. It is at once the child and the handmaid of production, and no more.

In this they are at least partly wrong. It is hardly fruitful to argue about the exact origins of science. Concerning such questions reliable knowledge is very scant. When man's consciousness commenced to waken him to the discernment of the properties of objects about him, when his mind began to build abstract conceptions and principles which constitute the true germs of science, what motives and propensities stirred him — all this is hidden in the mist of the past. One can support more than one thesis by appealing to appropriate examples and by ignoring uncomfortable evidence. The instances showing that science is due to economic needs can be countered by citations pointing to non-economic needs. Some claim that the overflow of the Nile was responsible for geometry in Egypt; but so was the desire to draw figures that would adorn the Egyptian temples. And then such behavior on the part of the Nile is a geographic and not an economic phenomenon. One wonders why geometry was developed by the speculative philosophers of Greece, who disliked labor, and not by the Egyptians. Others will assert that the sea voyages stimulated among the ancient peoples — the Phoenicians, for example — the study of astronomy. But so did the clear, starry skies of Egypt and Arabia; the ancient seers and practitioners of magic; the religious festivals that called for the determination of the precise time on which they fell due. Some will argue that the processes of production led to the study of mathematics and physics. But such studies were likewise urged on by the erection

of temples and imposing altars for the gods, by the building of pyramids and elaborate tombs for the dead.¹ Others will stress that the demand for dyes and paints stimulated chemistry. But this particular science was stimulated still more by the desire to cure the sick and to embalm the deceased. For long ages, and far into the eighteenth century, physicians and pharmacists were the only chemists, and their private abodes the only laboratories. Regarding such sciences, finally, as biology, geology, physiology, the claim to an economic origin is tenuous indeed. Probably the origins of science are attributable to a concatenation of causes, as economic needs, geographical conditions, religious incentives, inventiveness, curiosity, accident. Dr. O. T. Mason, of the Smithsonian Institution, has made an exhaustive study of the origins of tools, appliances, and devices, employed by primitive peoples in their work of procuring a livelihood. One should expect that at least in this sphere inventions were stimulated solely by economic exigencies. Yet in the conclusions drawn from his study, Dr. Mason states that "invention is stimulated" not only by human wants for food, clothing, shelter, rest, locomotion, but also by the wants for "6. delight of the senses; 7. knowledge, the explanation of things; 8. social enjoyment . . . ; 9. spiritual satisfaction."²

We are on somewhat firmer ground when the growth of science in modern times is considered. Marx and Engels claim that the sole propelling force which promotes scientific development proceeds from the necessity of answering questions posed by production, and that the requirements and needs of economic improvement furnish the only incentive to scientists to investigate and to increase knowledge in their fields. This is not a comprehensive view. Of course, economic conditions have a good deal to do with the matter. When they create problems that demand solution, no doubt scientists will devote to them their best efforts. Science does not generally occupy itself with fictitious questions; it is engaged in solving definite, concrete problems, some of them "general," others "special" or "applied." During a war, when many

¹ Cf. J. Dewey, *Creative Intelligence*, pp. 123, 131-133.

² *The Origins of Invention*, p. 410.

problems press for an answer on which the outcome of the contest depends, the endeavors of scientists receive a tremendous spur, and the war leaves some branches of science in a more developed state. But scientific problems do not issue exclusively from the province of production. Many branches of scientific research are exclusively or largely interested in the physical well-being of man — in the prolongation of life, in the eradication of disease, in the improvement of health, and in the raising of the quality of the population. Many sciences seek to discover the means of bettering the relations of man to man, and aim to enlarge his comprehension of mind and matter, of institutions and the universe. There are “light-bearing” studies and “fruit-bearing” studies, to use Professor Pigou’s expressions.

Further, whatever its origins, once a science has gained a start, it develops also, and very largely, of its own accord. It creates its own problems, interests, and stimuli. Each stage of its development gives rise to more questions, awakens further curiosities, opens up fresh avenues of research, and suggests new lines of attack. There are types of differential equations and peculiar functions waiting for study, there is the ultimate structure of the atom that excites curiosity, there are the behavior and nature of light waves that one would like to analyze, there is the cause of tides, the origin of life, the color of mice, and the evolution of man, that invite investigation. It is sufficient to open the current scientific periodicals to convince one’s self of the vast world of questions, manifestly unrelated to the economic domains as far as one can see at the moment, in which the realm of science is immersed and with which it busies itself. It is very largely a world of its own with an activity of its own. Of course, many of the questions may sooner or later render great service to economic needs, but such possibilities are not uppermost in the mind of the investigator.

Nor is the contention admissible that the sole motives animating the scientist in his labors are the immediate utilitarian prospects or economic compensation. What the scientist is interested in ordinarily is the observing of uniformities, the search for resemblances hidden beneath seeming incongruities, the deriving

of generalizations which would economize thought and effort. The winning of knowledge, the accumulation of a storehouse of principles, laws, and formulas which will be suited sooner or later to many requirements and which will answer many questions — this is his goal. What captivates him is the harmony and order, the beauty and unity, displayed by the manifestations he studies, and not the economic emolument. Henri Poincaré, an eminent mathematician and scientist says:

The scientist does not study nature because it is useful to do so. He studies it because he takes pleasure in it, and he takes pleasure in it because it is beautiful. . . . I am not speaking, of course, of that beauty which strikes the senses. What I mean is that more intimate beauty which comes from the harmonious order of its parts, and which a pure intelligence can grasp. . . . Intellectual beauty, on the contrary, is self-sufficing, and it is for it, more perhaps than for the future good of humanity, that the scientist condemns himself to long and painful labors.¹

Similar confessions are made by many a scientist who chooses to reveal to the public his motives and the workings of his mind. Professor John Dewey objects to the view that an instrumental theory of knowledge signifies "that the value of knowing is instrumental to the knower. This," he continues, "is a matter which is as it may be in particular cases; but certainly in many cases the pursuit of science is sport, carried on like other sports, for its own satisfaction."² He who watched the physicist or the chemist putter around in his laboratory will be convinced that what impels him is the scientific problems and interests. Anthropologists and paleologists, philologists and modern astronomers do not receive the impetus in their work from problems of production, but from human problems and human interests. It is not clear why we should insist that the physicists, chemists, or mathematicians always do. Are these latter of a different breed? Were Aristotle and Galen, Galileo and Kepler, Newton and Darwin, agitated by the economic incentives, and did they busy themselves with questions addressed to them from the factory? Utilitarian motives and economic interests are causes of scientific growth; but other motives and other interests also come in, and to a large extent.

¹ *Science and Method*, p. 22. Cf. pp. 27, 59.

² *Experience and Nature*, p. 151.

Let there be no misunderstanding. The argument above is not insisting that "idle curiosity" is the inspiring motive of the scientist and the prime mover of his achievements — if by idle curiosity is meant a purposeless, listless floundering around in the laboratory, a seizing upon anything that will help beguile an idle hour, a disinterested, child-like inclination to fabricate amusements. Such a type of curiosity will be productive of very little science. Indeed, it is difficult to conceive how such a postulate can fail to preclude fruitful results in any department of knowledge. The presence of definite purposes and guiding hypotheses, of persistent interests and attitudes, is imperative. Theory is the general, experiments are the soldiers. In addition, there must be curiosity — although not idle curiosity — and enjoyment in intellectual effort; else much work will be left undone. For scientific labors are not easy and delightful, but very frequently hard, monotonous, dirty. No; what the argument intends to emphasize is this, that the purposes, problems, and interests of the scientist are not solely economic, but that they also come from other spheres, and that Marx has little justification in holding that, while it is a powerful force that shapes the destinies of social development, science is merely the concomitant of the mode of production.

Nature and man, religion and science, are some of the elements that account for the static social phenomena, for the ruling institutions and ideas. One can readily see that they also throw much light on the dynamic aspects of history, on the processes that introduce change and progress. However, the question of social dynamics deserves more attention. When discussing the nature of historical progress Marx and Engels deal with it as if it were an automatic process: a dialectic force operates within each given mode of production, and creates conditions which, when perceived by the mature, oppressed class, incite it to struggles that culminate in a social transformation. The dialectic descends on production and of itself creates "contradictions" and forges for mankind the instruments of progress. It appears as if there were within the régime of production a kind of economico-molecular

bombardment on its periphery, a sort of fermenting, leavening action going on of its own accord.

This metaphysics is a piece of the whole cloth. Any device is acceptable which relegates the human agent to a secondary position, and which emphasizes that external, material forces dispose of history according to a peculiar plan inherent in them. The query arises why the dialectic does not choose to perform its antics within the modes of production that obtain in the economy of beasts and birds. Bears and beavers have interesting ways of gaining a livelihood, ants and bees have elaborate systems of division of labor; all creatures live off nature just as man does. Why does not the dialectic condescend to work for progress among them also? The answer is that progress is not a resultant of a carefully concocted dialectic hocus-pocus. There is something in human beings which makes for change and progress; in other creatures this something is lacking.

No discussion of progress is adequate which does not seek some of its causes in man's nature. The question of change and progress in the modes of production is part of the larger question of change and progress in every phase of civilization. By and large, there is discernible in the human being the persistent desire to improve and to expand what is. There is a restless groping for the better, an inner urge to take a step ahead. There is a desire not only to live, but to have life in greater abundance. In some individuals such stirrings are utterly lacking; in many they are quite active. This urge does not lead to spectacular leaps, but it results in continual, slow, imperceptible, and even insignificant changes and departures. It is noticeable in each sphere of life, in trivial things as well as in important affairs. It is true of the individual, be he the executive in the office or the housewife in her daily work; and it is true of groups, societies, and nations. It appears that the substance of man's existence consists of changes and step-by-step improvements; that human life means change, not only in the biological sense but also in higher senses. "When men or nations originate, they live and grow; when they cease to do that, they decay and die," says Dr. O. T. Mason.¹ There is no

¹ *The Origins of Invention*, p. 410.

concerted action here, no deliberate, organized planning. The process is rather haphazard, irregular, a medley of numerous individual trials and experimentations. The variations, slight as they may be, are selected, imitated, reproduced, and accumulated by accretions here and there, until appreciable departures result from a given starting point. Each change is a drop, but many drops make an ocean. Such is human nature.

It may be self-interest, economic and non-economic, that asserts itself here; but this is not all. Emulation, rivalry, sympathy, the desire for approval, and other traits, doubtlessly play a part. "The passion to be something in the minds and hearts of men is the very life of life, the fire which fuses individual energies into social power," says Professor C. H. Cooley.¹ The stir for betterment is of course counteracted by the human propensity to conserve and to yield to habit and tradition; but the stir is there, and it functions nevertheless. Just as there is something in us which leads us to conserve and to consolidate what we have, so there is something which impels us to break up in order to build better. Else things would stand still and wait for an environmental catastrophe to compel a change. It is something analogous to the biological process of anabolism and katabolism. With some individuals the one is stronger than the other. So it is with societies. In those communities where the individuals are not shackled, where they move within a circle of freedom of action, they contrive changes, and advance step by step. In Oriental countries the conservative force is stronger, perhaps because of religion and climate. This urge of improving, changing, and expanding is not creating something out of nothing. It starts with what is; but it prompts man to react to what is in such a manner that a change results or a step ahead.

Among the multitudes who are prone to change and to improve things there are some individuals who are capable of conceiving of serious and important advances. These are innovators. Their power of observing, imagining, and reasoning, their ability to associate facts and ideas and to discern hidden and subtle relations among them, is so great that they can envisage phenomena

¹ "Process of Social Change," in *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. xii, (1897), 70.

in new lights, can see from new viewpoints, and can suggest fertile ways in which parts of reality may be molded so as to promote a significant change or an appreciable improvement. They have new ways of reacting to the environment. It is not a question of fantastic inspiration, it is rather one, wholly or partly, of a biological variation: their minds are constructed in such a way; their biological and psychological endowments are different. They observe and discern more keenly, analyze and synthesize more profoundly, and obtain suggestions more abundantly. They learn more from their total environment than others, and they can do more in the way of utilizing it.

The innovation is at bottom nothing "new"; it is but a regrouping of the various fragments of experience, or a shifting of emphasis; but this regrouping and this change of emphasis are of great moment. Innovation is construction, not creation; it is consistent with the older things, but it is also supplementary to them. It will not be assimilated with the other social facts unless it harmonizes with the existing conditions, unless it meets a purpose and fulfills a need. But despite these qualifications, it is none the less an innovation and it represents an advance. For, even if a need is present, — and in society needs are perennially present, — it is not apparent to all. Very frequently the innovator has to discern the need, devise a way of meeting it, and open people's eyes to both the need and the solution. Fundamentally, it is precisely what is done with the materials at hand that determines the originality and the contribution of the innovator. To illustrate, the architect builds a temple out of brick, timber, and metal which he finds at hand. There is nothing new in these materials, but there is more to the edifice than a conglomeration of these materials. Shakespeare found ready about him ink, paper, words, even his themes and characters; but what he did with all this, the manner in which his mind reacted to all this and utilized it, constitutes Shakespeare.

Some admit that all this is true of fields like art and literature, but they insist that in the domain of science there can be no such thing as innovation. There are no inventions so-called and no inventors. They assert that when an insistent need arises for a

certain scientific improvement, and when the previous stages of scientific development have fully prepared the ground for it, — in other words, when the environment paves the path to it, so that it cannot help being discovered, — then it is discovered. Anybody can step in and make the discovery; there is no inventiveness about it. To lend strength to their view, they furnish a list of inventions which occurred simultaneously in two or three different places, and which were achieved independently by as many individuals. Such views are well taken if they intend to combat the idea that an inventor conjures up something miraculous out of totally inadequate material; that divine or any other inscrutable inspiration comes upon him, and during such lucid moments great conceptions throng his mind. But, it seems to me, they are not well taken if their design is to urge that inventions are not at all dependent upon peculiar qualities of mind, which are not given to each person to possess; that anybody interested in the particular field could not help stumbling on the invention; and that all inventions are part and parcel of the ordinary day's work of the ordinary scientist. That at times such is the case must be conceded; but it is not always so.

An inventor regroups experiences and ideas and views them in a different manner. Such a performance derives its source and power from particular mental capacities. Lists of inventions and discoveries by several persons working independently of each other do not disprove this; on the contrary, they may lend it support. They may suggest that in the wide scientific world every now and then two or three persons are found who are so similar in their mental character that, when confronted with the same situations and problems, they react in much the same manner. When, at the same stage of knowledge, only one or two Newtons become agitated over the question why the proverbial apple fell down and not up, and discover the law of gravity; when one or two Galileos gain the idea of the pendulum when observing and musing over the oscillations of the chandeliers in the chapel, it is fair to infer that, while reality and experience must be present, the peculiar type of mind and inclination must also be present, before the reaction to reality results in important scientific innovations. The

environment may be replete with hints and suggestions, — it always is, — but not everybody will be alive to them, and very few will translate them into discoveries and inventions. Such achievements are not mere matters of automatic and mechanical responses to stimuli. Any stenographer can turn shorthand into words, and any expert reader of hieroglyphics can transform the emblems into a story. But not every person acquainted with the distracting masses and fragments of scientific experiments, with the wilderness of laws, theories, hypotheses, conjectures, and controversies, can select a specific set of relevant and pregnant facts and theories, detect their underlying similarities and their hidden interrelations, and abstract from them such ideas and principles as will yield inventions and further laws. The intercession of a particular quality of mind is indispensable. The keenness of perception, the wealth of the apperceptive background; the gift of imagination and association; the power of reasoning, with its procedures of analysis and synthesis, comparison and contrast, abstraction and generalization: the intervention of all these qualities is imperative. And all these qualities are not shared equally by all men or by all scientists.

Some may retort that scientific truth is one, that scientific discovery is an inevitable concomitant of the progressive search for truth, and that therefore the mind of the investigator cannot alter things, cannot put an imprint on them and endow them with the glamour of invention. True, scientific truth is one, objective, and impersonal. But it does not follow that it reveals itself of its own accord. It has to be won. "Nature does not wear her most useful lessons on her sleeve," said Walter Bagehot. Speculation, hypotheses, reasoning, and experimentation are needed before the road to truth is discovered; and here the innovator is an important figure. The nature and behavior of light waves have always been constant. But the determination of this nature and behavior can be obtained only after prolonged study, and the investigator with great mental powers can contribute a good deal. In the eighteenth century the ruling hypothesis was the one propounded by Newton, who claimed that light consisted of exceedingly minute particles. This was superseded in the nine-

teenth century by Huygens's hypothesis that light is a vibratory, wave-like movement in the imponderable ether. At present both the corpuscular and the vibratory ideas are accepted in part; and scientists are still investigating the problem for more thorough knowledge. The planetary motion had not changed its courses over long ages. Yet the character of this motion has never been an open secret. For thirteen centuries the Ptolemaic geocentric "system," with its hierarchy of epicycles, held sway; while soon after the sixteenth century, the modern heliocentric theory, proposed by Copernicus and promulgated by Galileo, had come into vogue.

What is true of the domain of art and science holds good of any other sphere. For example, statesmen, reformers, or thinkers on social questions may gain a deeper insight into the potentialities of latent social forces; and they may perceive that there is need for a change, and that the ground is ready for it. They may possess keener understanding, a kindlier attitude, or a more wakeful conscience. They conceive of the means that would synthesize the welter of possibilities, and that would give direction to social currents, amplifying and enhancing their power. Through writing and lectures, discussion and controversy, they spread new viewpoints, wake the desire for improvement, focus attention and concentrate energies on issues, and help in finding solutions. They arouse the masses, awaken them to a sense of "rights" and duties, "manifest destinies" and ideals; and they supply watchwords, slogans, and myths.

There is here no willful tearing up of the weavings of history, and no abrupt injection into it of totally foreign and incompatible ingredients. Nor are the efforts for the change well organized, moving with army-like relentlessness and precision, steadily and unflinchingly driving at the objective; nor are the tactics the noblest, the motives the purest. The process is more prosaic. Many minds, various ideas, schemes, and proposals, coöperate, interact, and clash; self-interest, jealousy, bitterness, and treachery creep in; the activity is haphazard, halting, swerving, retreating; and ultimately the result may be a chilling compromise. Yet, despite all this, the innovators have achieved something: new ground has

been won, the ground won has been consolidated and utilized, and a new point of departure has been attained for further change. True, the innovation will not gain a foothold if it does not harmonize with the network of surrounding facts; true, the masses are not without their contribution. Nevertheless there is a residuum which the innovators can claim as their product. Professor J. M. Baldwin observes: "We never hear of society suddenly making up its mind, in a collective way, to do this or that; it is always individuals who work upon society through other individuals."¹

It is in this manner that change or progress very generally proceeds — be it in legislation, in turning away from traditional religious viewpoints, in amendments to a constitution, or in attempts to abolish war. It would be extremely difficult to find a single idea in the writings of Marx that was original with him. Yet his selection of ideas and his way of grouping and emphasizing them resulted in a system that had an overmastering influence on the socialist movement in all countries; an influence that any follower of his would be eager to acknowledge, although in the same breath he would argue against the imputation of any significance to individualities.²

History is not a summation of mechanical and automatic reactions of dumb agents to a dictatorial environment; it is an aggregate of reactions of multitudes of intelligences, and among them are the higher reactions of the greater intelligences and more pronounced personalities. The very fact that we meet in history personages whom we style as having been "ahead of their times," indicates that some minds see more in reality about them and view things in a more fertile manner than the multitudes. Roger Bacon in the thirteenth century had points of view and attitudes

¹ *Social and Ethical Interpretations*, p. 461.

² Engels writes to Liebknecht: "Although I have seen him [Marx] to-night stretched out on his bed, the face rigid in death, I cannot grasp the thought that this genius should have ceased to fertilize with his powerful thoughts the proletarian movement of both worlds. Whatever we all are, we are through him; and whatever the movement of to-day is, it is through his theoretical and practical work; without him we should still be stuck in the mire of confusion." Quoted in Liebknecht, *Karl Marx, Biographical Memoirs*, p. 46.

toward science that were almost entirely foreign to the medieval mind, and that gained recognition only centuries later. He was far ahead of his time.¹ If we believe in mind, in hereditary mental capacity, in differences of hereditary abilities among individuals, no stretch of imagination is required and no heroic assumptions, to see that there are innovators and innovations. "The fact," says Bryce, "that the progress of mankind in arts and sciences and letters and every form of thought has been due to the efforts of a comparatively small number of highly gifted minds rising out of the common mass speaks for itself. Natural Inequality has been and must continue to be one of the most potent and effective factors in human society."²

We may say, then, that one source of progress in social life consists in the innumerable, haphazard, small changes, and especially in the more serious innovations of the better endowed minds and characters — all promulgated under the spur of various needs and interests, economic and non-economic; under the stimulus of emulation, rivalry, sympathy, and ideals. These slight changes, as well as the more manifest deviations, are selected, imitated, propagated, solidified, and transmitted by education, tradition, custom, and law. Neither the mode of production nor the dialectic can of itself generate change and progress.

Some maintain that the presence of superior ability cannot account for innovations, because, while possessed by the minority, it is always certain to be present; and therefore it ought to be regarded as a stationary factor. They hold that changes in culture constitute the variable factor, and are consequently to be taken as the cause of invention. This is an interesting view, only it stops too soon. What is culture, and what effects changes in it? If culture is a synthesis of institutions, ideas, customs, and attitudes — then innovators have the opportunity to consummate changes and progress in it; then this view resolves itself into the assertion that one complex of innovations will prepare the soil for further changes. Others believe that they present a final unassailable argument when they mention that history is governed by

¹ H. O. Taylor, *The Mediaeval Mind*, vol. ii, 484 ff.

² *Modern Democracies*, vol. i, 62.

objective laws, that the inherent historical tendencies will bow to no personalities, and that the course of history is irresistible and not subject to deviations. The query arises: precisely what is meant by law, tendency, course? What sort of entities are they that we must think of them as making history for us? How much more are they than convenient terms the mind employs in the attempt to unravel and understand social phenomena? Precisely what creates the "laws," guides the "tendency," and regulates the "course?"

This view is not identical with the great man theory of history, if by great men are meant personalities standing immeasurably above the ordinary innovators, and if by the theory is meant that history is a succession of illustrious performances achieved by powerful personalities, irrespective of the social *milieu* and in a manner out of accord with cause and effect; that "an institution is the lengthened shadow of one man"; and that history is a recital of how leaders led and masses followed. Such a theory is the outcome, in many cases, of an aversion for a thorough, realistic consideration of the manifold elements that combine to produce a result; of a propensity to dramatize and to romanticize historic events. Instead of undertaking a painful scrutiny of a total situation, it is more convenient to fasten one's attention on a personality, to clothe it with heroic attributes, to cluster around it the relevant details of the picture, and to regard it as the cardinal cause from which all things irradiated. The result is at once attractive, plausible, and easy of comprehension. Where otherwise there would reign a mass of general, impersonal factors, refractory and baffling, we find harmony and order, something easy to visualize and account for.

This method economizes effort, for both the investigator and the reader. But it makes history too elementary and naïve. It relies on *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*. Every phase of the event has a ready cause embodied in the glittering individuality created for the purpose. As Professor John Dewey shrewdly observes:

We are all natural Jack Horners. If the plum comes when we put in and pull out our thumb we attribute the satisfactory result to personal virtue. The plum is obtained, and it is not easy to distinguish obtaining from attaining, acquisition from achieving. Jack Horner, Esq., put forth *some* effort;

and results and efforts are always more or less incommensurate. For the result is always dependent to some extent upon the favor or disfavor of circumstance. Why then should not the satisfactory plum shed its halo retrospectively upon what precedes and be taken as a sign of virtue? In this way heroes and leaders are constructed.¹

When a sagacious and elaborate inquiry is made into an outstanding historical achievement, the results obtained are more prosaic and more complicated. Instead of the central heroic personality we see revealed the coöperation of numerous social currents, the ferment of diverse ideas, and the slow awakening of the masses. History is not made by bold spectacular leaps, but by the painful accumulation of modest increments in which long successions of modest innovators collaborated. Distance lends enchantment. An examination at close range dethroned many a hero who enjoyed the rent of a lighthearted and gratuitous imputation of celebrated deeds.

This sketch is brief and incomplete, for the forces at work in shaping the destinies of society can be encompassed neither by a formula nor by a brief mention of a few elements. The ruling forces of civilization present a very difficult and perplexing subject; and a discussion of this or that factor offers no more than a few glimpses. Professor Cooley remarks very justly regarding Tarde's book on the laws of imitation:

I think that other phases of social activity, such, for instance, as communication, competition, differentiation, adaptation, idealization, have as good claims as imitation to be regarded as the social process, and that a book similar in character to M. Tarde's might, perhaps, be written upon any one of them.²

Further, in this sketch the various elements have been treated as disparate and parallel phenomena influencing the life of society. But in reality they are all interdependent agencies. Geographical environment, dominant traits of human nature, spiritual and mental forces, institutions and attitudes, all are in intimate alliance and in mutual interaction in their work of molding history and compelling changes and advances.

¹ J. Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, p. 253. Italics are not mine.

² *Human Nature and the Social Order*, p. 272 n.

Yet even this cursory survey is sufficient to demonstrate how lightly Marx viewed the problem, and why an empirical test of his theory by an appeal to general facts in history establishes the fact that his interpretation fails to interpret. The mode of production cannot be accepted as the sole and sovereign factor and as the only key to an understanding of social manifestations. Other forces, some wholly and others partly independent of production, influence human history. These forces receive inadequate recognition and treatment at his hands. Some forces receive incomplete consideration, others are not emphasized sufficiently, while still others are passed over in complete silence.

It may be objected at this point that a charge of omissions against Marx is irrelevant, because his was not a philosophy of history but rather a method of studying it. As a method of approach, as a viewpoint, it is not expected to take into account everything that influences the course of civilization. This objection is not well founded. Marx intends to offer a philosophy of history, not a method. His interpretation claims to explain the origin, nature, and destiny of the state, law, politics, religion, morality, and science. It divides history into epochs, and indicates why each epoch dissolves in order to cede its place to the next one. It explores the course of the past, subjects to a critical analysis the present, and predicts the future. It explains how man lives and thinks, what his fundamental interests and motives are, why he is dissatisfied, and how he struggles. It inspires and consoles the proletarians and promises them the happy land. It explains the mechanism of the present order, discloses its processes, and diagnoses its pathology; it suggests and insists on the cure. It begins, continues, and ends history. Is all this to be called merely a method of history? The socialists attempt to salvage Marx's theory by bestowing on it the innocuous name of a method. But if it is true that Marx offered only a method of approaching the study of history, it is not altogether clear why they put so much stress on the materialistic interpretation. Why should such a theory interest them at all? Are socialists inevitably and inherently also students of historical methodology? They ought to ignore it as they ignore Engels's articles on military tactics and

Marx's writings on the Turkish question and his manuscript notes on calculus.

Marx's interpretation of history suffers in the same manner as any other one-sided exposition, and for the same reason. The content of social life presents a vast mass of phenomena intertangled in all possible ways; and the more intensive one's study of history, the more numerous the details grow and the more puzzling they become. The interpreter of history finds it impossible to search into all the particulars in the inchoate mass and reduce them to a semblance of order. He must attempt a selection of the facts; and here the mischief begins to creep in. The selection is made according to the traditional standards or the idiosyncrasies of the historian who may adhere to a particular school or promulgate special theories of his own.

The facts selected, like any other historical facts, differ from facts and objects under ordinary observation in every-day life. The latter a person can perceive with his physical senses, without the interposition of the so-called higher faculties of intelligence. We see children at play, we hear the bird sing, we feel the cold rock. But social phenomena are generally not such rudimentary, objective, and discrete data. They are the reflections of human relations, emotions, thoughts, and errors; they are intertwined with other circumstances in a complicated maze; they are fluid and evasive. They cannot be perceived and grasped at a glance; they have to be isolated, interpreted, and evaluated. Judgment, discrimination, and analysis are called into action. Social data come to us not through perception, but by apperception. There is ample opportunity for grinding one's axe.

The difficulties, moreover, do not terminate at this juncture. To win an understanding of historic events, it is necessary to establish sequences, uniformities, cause and effect. Now every event has an endless number of causes, for it is a function of the *total* situation. Secondly, the causal connection is not implicit in the phenomena themselves, and does not constitute a distinct essence wrought into the texture of facts, binding and governing them, so that it can be unmistakably detected. Cause and effect is a mental construct, something we read into facts; an invention

of the mind seeking to understand and control. Cause-and-effect relationships are not disclosed automatically. There is room for the personal equation.

The sequel of the process of selecting and comprehending the data and of unraveling their causal connections is that it permits the interpreter of history who possesses a favorite theory to profess too much. Guiding principles are valuable; they are the ready tools, the accumulated capital of the scientist. They enable him to orientate himself in a conglomeration of items, to plan experiments, and to organize complex material. But they become his despot if he allows them to take complete possession of his mentality. Consciously or unconsciously he will fit the plastic material into a preordained pattern, and fashion it into a configuration congenial to his preconceptions. He will see in the long history of a great nation nothing but the supreme confirmation of his principle. Men construct ideologies, and then are enslaved by them. Inalienable rights, natural law, *laissez-faire*, social contract, — such ideas have played a prominent part in the social process at one time or another. Similar ideas reign in every important province of human experience.¹ Many a scientist, particularly a social scientist, is not immune, in his own work, from the worship of an ideology. He looks at the world through a prism of meticulous formulas and special theories. With him, social facts have to pass the censorship of sophisticated measurement, fixed technical rules, and professional traditions, before they are admitted into the fellowship of relevant data. The result is emasculation, disproportionate emphasis, and fatal distortion; the result is that history is written and interpreted to accommodate a private theory or a time-worn dogma. Men like Carlyle, Kidd, Loria, and Marx are hardly exempt from such a charge.

¹ This view, in its application to war, receives brilliant treatment at the hands of Professor A. A. Young. See his presidential address on "Economics and War," in *American Economic Review*, vol. xiv (1926), 1-13.

CHAPTER XVII

SOME LOGICAL WEAKNESSES OF THE THEORY

THE discussion so far has been largely concerned with the grave omissions of which Marx's conception of history may be judged guilty. The interesting question arising at present is whether, aside from any omissions, the chief elements of his theory are in themselves sound and illuminating; whether his view is tenable as far as it goes. Marx's interpretation of history presents a simple formula. The mode of production is the source from which flow all the other phases of social life, and the dialectic operating within the productive system generates the class struggle which promotes progress. The form of production and the class struggle are the two crucial constituents. What valuable elucidations do they offer?

First, as to the mode of production. Marx sets it forth as a monistic agency in the course of human affairs. However, a consideration of the forces at work in history will lead us to believe that if one insists on singling out those which in the "last instance" constitute the prime movers, one should rather turn his attention to the interaction between natural environment and human nature than to the organization of production. Given the geographical surroundings and man, with the mental and other endowments which distinguish him from other animals, and the rest will follow. These two agencies are the starting point. Marx and Engels reiterate that all things are in a flux, and that all historical phenomena are intertwined. Yet, in spite of these protestations, they dissever the system of production from all other manifestations; parade it as the original, independent fact; and treat it as if it were dropped ready made on earth and ordained to serve as the foundation and propeller of all the historical processes. This is too simple a view. The organization of production is a complex social phenomenon calling for the utilization of many material and spiritual resources, and requiring for its expression

and operation the antecedent accumulation of a social heritage. It is not a cause. It is rather a resultant; or, still better, something in organic interdependence with many other aspects of civilization. To single it out as the initial, independent phenomenon is to proceed in an arbitrary manner.

Nor does the mode of production represent a distinct and unitary fact. It is a collection, a relationship of entities. Several factors combine in a given way, and the result is a system of production. According to Marx, the natural resources, the laborers and their organization, the tools, appliances, and achievements in the various fields of natural science, all unite to build and to characterize a mode of production. It follows, then, that when he advances the mode of production as the basic cause of all civilization, he really implies that the conjuncture of natural wealth, laborers, technique, and science, is the basic cause of civilization. In other words, he employs a phrase which conceals the substance. He amalgamates several relevant elements, gives them one collective name, and thinks he has derived a monistic interpretation of history. He treats the group of these elements as a chemical compound, as a fortuitous concourse of atoms. He forgets the ingredients that go to make the substance, but fastens his eyes on the resultant compound, and chooses to designate it as the original datum.

Marx also forgets that a system of production is inextricably bound up with aspects of social existence other than the elements he recognizes. Just as science has at present a prominent influence on production and is an integral part of it, so religion was in the past, and is in more than one instance, even in modern times. Primitive and ancient religions, Catholicism in the Middle Ages and Protestantism in the early days of modern capitalism, as well as many creeds at present, are intimately allied with the productive enterprises of peoples. Moreover, governmental and political institutions and expedients, customs and conventions, legal systems and legal ways of regarding the relations of man to man and of man to things, must be taken into consideration. Obliterate all idea of custom, law, regulations, and hardly a trace will remain of the concepts serf, guildmaster, bourgeois, private property,

interest, competition.¹ The mode of production, like any other vital organ of society, ramifies into various phases of social existence, drawing strength from some, limited by others, but in constant mutual interaction with all of them. One cannot say categorically that production is the antecedent and the cause, all the rest is the consequent and the effect; that production is a discrete phenomenon, abstracted from all else.

The failure to take cognizance of these various aspects of the problem renders the mode of production a vague and barren concept. Compare, for example, the slave régime of classical antiquity and the feudal system. They are two distinct societies with two different forms of production, according to Marx. Yet an observer of both forms of production would find no disparities if he were guided only by Marx's instructions. In both societies the observer would see the same technique employed, the same use of natural resources, and apparently the same type of labor. People produced commodities in the Middle Ages in much the same way as in ancient days. The Marxian formula of land, labor, and capital would not inform the observer that he is facing two divergent systems of production. The discrepancy between them consists, according to Marx, in the status of labor: in one case the laborer is a slave, in the other a serf, a master craftsman, or a journeyman. But the question of status is a question of law, custom, and institutions — exactly the particulars Marx rules out of the concept, regarding them as consequences of the régime of production and as mere details of the ideological superstructure.

The same difficulty is encountered when we compare the present system and the future socialistic régime. Marx and Engels hail this coming order as a radically different form of production. Yet neither technique nor natural resources will experience an alteration. Only the division of labor will be so constituted as to render the work agreeable to the laborer. Assuredly, it would be absurd to find in so unimportant an innovation the fundamental characteristic of socialism. Marx appreciates this; accordingly he expands on other characteristics,

¹ Cf. R. Stammler, *Wirtschaft und Recht*, pp. 223, 253, 281, 299.

vastly more significant. "The expropriators are expropriated" . . . "the abolition of private property" — this is at once the outstanding achievement of the new order and the epitome of its distinguishing features.¹ Private property, exploitation, and competition are thoroughly extirpated; and, instead, a coöperative society of "free" laborers, emancipated from the dominance of the capitalist, enters on its career. These transformations are the basic marks of the new régime; but what are these transformations, in essence, if not institutional and legal?

There can be no clear characterization of a mode of production if we dissociate it from the prevailing ideas and institutions. And if we are to agree with those who insist that by a mode of production Marx implies technique alone, the case would be still more hopeless; for from the days of Hammurabi down to the eighteenth century, a period of time in which Marx sees a sequence of four distinct modes of production, the technical processes of producing commodities had hardly undergone any essential change.

We are further given to understand that the dialectic implicit in the mode of production expands the productive forces until they assume the configuration of a different productive system, no longer compatible with the old order and insistently calling for new institutions. That is, the dialectically behaving form of production, without the aid of other agencies, prepares the ground for the class struggle, and thereby effects the transition from one economic era to another, from one society to another. Now the very account furnished by Marx and Engels of the successive productive systems fails to support this idea of the single-handed potency of the mode of production. In each case external or accidental forces are invoked to effect the transition, forces unallied with the inherent necessities of the dialectic or the productive régime.

There is no revelation of any incurable contradictions logically embedded in the gens order, or of any inherent necessity for antagonistic classes within it. Why a peaceful communistic society, breeding splendid men and women, should be thrown into internal

¹ Cf. above, chap. 2, p. 35.

turmoil and strife, and why it should be doomed to dissolution, one can hardly conceive. Just how the dialectic process inexorably labors for a transformation of a communal form of production, as it existed in the Greek and in the Roman gens, into a slave form of production, is not made evident. The dialectic does not always perform such antics, since some peoples entirely evade the stage of slavery, and cross directly from the gens to the feudal order, whereas with other peoples the gens organization persists indefinitely. Witness the transition of the German tribes who invaded Rome to the feudal stage, without the intermediate stage of slavery, in Engels's *Origin of the Family*. Engels himself admits that the gens societies will continue in the same status for thousands of years, "until intercourse with the outside world develops causes of disruption within them as a conclusion of which their dissolution comes about."¹ In other words, the mode of production and the dialectic process within it will not by themselves generate the agencies that compel a change; an extraneous factor must come in. Marx, too, makes a similar confession.²

It is not demonstrated, likewise, that, logically and by processes of its own, a slave society grows irresistibly into a feudal one. Engels invokes external events to aid in this transformation. The wars had to impoverish Rome, disturb the markets, and render the *latifundiae* superfluous. Wars, barbarian invasions, official oppression, are introduced to explain why the free small farmer was forced to seek security by leaning on the richer neighbors, and to reduce himself to a serf in compensation for the protection obtained. Are wars, barbarian invasions, oppressive tax-gatherers and judges, the direct, inevitable, and peculiar concomitants of a slave system? Finally, even capitalism does not appear on the state as a natural outgrowth of feudalism, and without the powerful intervention of institutional and other factors. The geographical discoveries, state action, the Reformation, all the phases of the so-called original accumulation performed a tremendous function here, as Marx himself acknowledges;³ and

¹ *Anti-Dühring*, p. 179.

² *Capital*, vol. iii, 390, 392-393.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. i, chaps. 27 and 31; vol. iii, 391, 911.

these phases were not the inexorable and specific issues of the feudal form of production.

It may be observed by way of digression, that the whole question of the linear succession of gens, slavery, feudalism, and capitalism is open to grave doubts. Investigations of various anthropologists demonstrate that communism is not typical of primitive peoples, and that no one general rule can be enunciated pertaining to primitive social organization. Many a student maintains, likewise, that in antiquity some societies, as in Egypt and China, went through the stages of slavery, feudalism, and systems not unlike our so-called capitalism. The researches of scholars like Professor Eduard Meyer suggest that ancient Greece was by no means the slave-ridden society she is commonly taken to have been. According to Marx, capitalism first appeared in the sixteenth century. He refuses to see that capitalism stands for something much broader than merely a specific manner of making goods; that it is an institution characterized by a set of economic features, such as the employment of capital in production, buying and selling, geographical division of labor, commerce, markets, the use of money and credit; and that such an institution flourished in the Near East some two thousand years before the modern era, spread thence to the north of the Mediterranean, and from there to Western Europe.¹ Marx himself admits on one occasion that history does not conform to his classification; and he suggests that it is conceivably possible that Russia might avoid the vicissitudes of the capitalist régime and effect a direct transition to a socialist society.²

In brief, to bring forward the mode of production as the material, unitary, and original cause and basis of all civilization is to build on shaky ground. A productive system is not material, in the first place. Laborers, with their intellects, skill, and organization, are not material agents; nor are the technical processes, since they are the embodiment of thought, knowledge, and scien-

¹ This thesis is treated very well by Professor M. M. Knight in his *Economic History of Europe to the End of the Middle Ages*. See Professor A. A. Young's introduction, p. iv; the author's preface, p. viii, and *passim*.

² *Lettre sur le développement économique de la Russie*, in *Le mouvement socialiste*, vol. vii, 968-972.

tific endeavors, even if we concede to Marx that the motive of scientific progress is wholly economic. The only material agent that remains is natural resources. Nor is the mode of production the primordial motive force, as it itself is inconceivable without the peculiarities of the natural environment, and without human nature and intelligence, which must serve as starting-points. To dissociate a few items from all the other aspects of social existence, to put them together under a new name, to point to this collection as the initial monistic fact in history and as the dominant cause of the course of human destinies, is a wholly arbitrary procedure. One might as well single out of the human organism, the eyes, cheeks, and ears; call them a face; then accord the face the honor of having been the first part of the body to evolve into existence, and the most vital part; and then bestow on it the sovereign place of figuring as the fundamental cause, in the "last instance," of man's nature and of his career and fortunes throughout his life.

The second element of the formula is the class struggle. Considerations of self-interest compel the workers to ally themselves with the dialectic and to battle for the introduction of the new régime. This idea is based on a chain of definite theses: society is ultimately stratified into two unified, well-organized classes; the oppressed class is moved wholly by economic self-interest; this class perceives clearly the nature and causes of its troubles; and it knows definitely what measures will remove them. Let us examine these theses.

The question of the class struggle is part of the larger phenomenon of emulation and rivalry, of contacts and collisions, of groups in society. There is no good reason why all the emphasis should be put on two particular classes, the wage-earner and the employer, to use modern society as an example. Society consists of a multitude of classes and groups. There are religious sects, occupational groups, political parties, racial and linguistic blocs. That there are or will be just two compact economic classes is an extraordinary piece of dogmatism. In the first place, the middle class refuses to disappear. In all countries it represents a vital

part of the population, and in some countries it forms the backbone. The proletariat and the employers do not make up the whole. The small and big farmers, the small business man, the shopkeeper, and the independent skilled artisan persist. This is true whether we consider highly industrial or less developed countries. Marx's predictions went wrong, as many of his followers have been compelled to admit. The middle class stays and thrives.

In the second place, the two well-unified, well-organized, opposed classes, ready to do battle with each other, are two myths. There are varieties of interests, prejudices, and hierarchies within each class that preclude the single-minded group-consciousness and the perfect unity of action of which Marx is so fond of dreaming. Among the workers of the United States, for example, we find the more or less definite divisions into the skilled and the unskilled; the organized and the unorganized; the white-collar labor and the labor in overalls; those who have money in the bank, stocks in the "company" and some property, and those who live from hand to mouth; the colored and the white; the natives and the foreign born; the socialists, the communists, the I. W. W.; the radicals, the liberals, the reactionaries, and the great mass of the indifferent. Such diversities persist. The mere fact that laborers work for employers is insufficient to render them alike in all important respects, to break down racial, religious, social, and political barriers, and to make millions of individuals into one compact, homogeneous unit. Nor are the employers a single-minded group. There are those who are injured by a policy of protection and those who thrive on it; there are the agricultural interests arrayed against the industrial interests, *the Agraarstaat* and *the Industriestaat*; there are the small business men who fear and dislike "big business," and the concerns operating on a competitive basis that are enemies of monopoly; there are the grievances against the bankers, the railway companies, the middlemen; there is the perennial strife between concerns trying to capture the same market, and the bitter battles with establishments that discover and produce substitutes.

Individuals refuse to be pressed into this or that class. Martin

is right when he points out that the engineer receiving \$150 a month is as far from the Italian section-hand as the president of the railroad is from the engineer; that the capitalist farmer feels more at one with his hired laborer than with the capitalist mine owner; that the white carpenter or bricklayer has more class prejudice against the negro teamster than the Jewish banker has against the Jewish tailor; that the shop girl deems herself as superior to the servant girl as her mistress feels herself superior to the shop girl; that the retail tobacconists showed as much hostility to the tobacco trust as factory hands have ever shown toward an employer; that independent refiners fought the Standard Oil Company as bitterly as the Homestead strikers fought the Carnegie Steel Company; and that miners deported negroes and Chinese from the gold camps as readily as mine owners deported strikers.¹

But aside from such facts, the very dialectic monsters that Marx conjures up turn against their master and devour his two favorite creations. With the progressive development of capitalism a unified, harmonious proletarian class becomes a logical impossibility. It is inconsistent with Marx's theory of the industrial reserve army and increasing misery. With the ever-accumulating "relative surplus population," more and more workers find themselves destitute and without employment; and the competitive struggle for work becomes a battle for life and death. Each worker, in the desperate attempt to save himself from starvation, offers his labor-power for sale on increasingly degraded terms. The proletarians fight with one another for the opportunity to a wretched job. How can one expect under such circumstances a well-organized, coherent, deliberative body marching against its enemy? One of the gravest defects of the present system Marx finds in competition. He calls it anarchy of production, *bellum omnium contra omnes*; and he proposes to substitute for it a régime of coöperation. If this is what competition typifies, where is the opportunity for harmony among laborers?

Similarly, the same dialectic destroys the unity of the capitalist

¹ *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, vol. xxiii, 513-515.

class. As capital accumulates, the bourgeoisie, too, are arrayed against each other. The incessant competition and underselling; the irrepressible tendency toward concentration and centralization, with the correlative elimination from the battle of the small and weak capitalists; the bitter fight over placing one's own capital successfully while forcing the other fellow to keep his unemployed; the mad attempt to stem the falling rate of profit — all this raises one capitalist against another.¹ One capitalist kills many, teaches Marx. Under such conditions a consolidated, harmonious bourgeois class is inconceivable.

Instead, then, of two compact classes preparing for the onslaught, we see two exasperated hordes, in each of which the members are flying at one another's throats with great consternation. Instead of bisecting society into two solid and antagonistic populations, the dialectic demoralizes the members of each side, and promotes the recrudescence of Hobbes's natural state, with the war of all against all.

History, too, fails to support Marx here. He and his friend pride themselves on the fact that they base their contention as to the mission of the proletariat not on abstractions, but on facts from history. History, they maintain, teaches that the proletariat is to build a new society. Historical facts do not sustain their claim. When an old society cedes its place to a new one, it is not because of a struggle between the two classes figuring as agents in the mode of production; that is, between the exploiters and the exploited. Nor does the lower class of the older society ascend to the position of the dominant class in the new régime. In ancient days the chief classes were the masters and the slaves, according to Marx. When this order gave way to feudalism, it was not because of a class struggle between the masters and the slaves ending in the triumph of the latter. Nor was it the slave who became the feudal lord in the new society. Similarly with the transition from feudalism to capitalism. In feudal society the main classes were the lords and the serfs, the guildsmen and the journeymen. But capitalism did not come about as a result of the struggle between the classes, whether in the country or in

¹ Cf., *Communist Manifesto*, p. 25.

the city; nor is it true that in the new system which succeeded, the capitalist class was recruited from the serfs or the journeymen. Marx acknowledges that the so-called "original accumulation," which made capitalism possible, transformed "serfs into wage-laborers," and expropriated the small independent producer in industry or agriculture; and Engels states explicitly that "the members of the guilds in the Middle Ages developed into the modern bourgeois, the journeymen of the guilds and the day laborers, on their part, developed into the proletariat."¹

If, from the Marxian viewpoint, history teaches anything in this connection, it is this: first, the supersession of one economic era by another is not the outcome of a contest between the two economic classes in a given social order; and second, the upper class continues to occupy a position of dominance in the successive societies, and the lower class a position of subjection. Neither the slave nor the serf nor the journeymen fought for, and ushered in, the respective new régimes. The slave generally became the serf, and the serfs and the journeymen turned proletarian. History does not teach, then, that the world belongs to rabbits; it teaches that rabbits belong to foxes. Wherefrom does it follow that it is the "historical mission" of the laborers to struggle for a new order and to turn masters, if we are to base the prediction on reasoning from historical data?

This theory of bi-class society is based on the postulate that economic self-interest is the all-powerful, all-absorbing motive, never failing to assert itself, and ruthlessly overriding and destroying all other motives and interests that ever dare to compete with it. Only on the basis of such a premise can one claim that an individual is first of all a member of this or that economic class, that he is defined and characterized by it, that all his being is centered in it, that he sees through it and acts with it, and that he is nothing without it. What some German philosophers attribute to the State in molding the individual, Marx confers upon the class. Such a premise is an exaggeration. Taken in all their activities and reactions, men have a multiplicity of interests; and with some one interest, with others another, plays a pre-

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 834-835; Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 37-38.

ponderant rôle. No generalization can be made. It depends on the particular nature of the persons. Common observations, as well as history, furnish ample evidence. The early Christians chose to go to the lions for their faith, the Huguenots and the Puritans preferred exile and privation to the abandonment of their convictions, and the Jews could have improved their lot immeasurably throughout the ages had they relinquished their religion. A Catholic association is more coherent, and is endowed with greater vitality, than a union of harness-makers or window-cleaners.

The socialist may scorn the sentiments of patriotism, but such sentiments persist none the less. The worker has no nationality, cries the *Communist Manifesto*: "modern industrial labor, modern subjection to capital, the same in England as in France, in America as in Germany, has stripped him of every trace of national character."¹ Nevertheless, he exhibits racial and national pride and prejudice just as strenuously as other people. The Polish worker hated the Russian, the French proletarian had his heartburnings over Alsace-Lorraine, the Irish laborer regarded himself as the born enemy of the Englishman, and the German wage-earner just now wastes no love on Poland or France. It is this variety of interests and prejudices that provides for the American employer a weapon against labor organization. Whenever possible, he places in one group workers who have come from different European countries. Instead of uniting in common cause against the "capitalist oppressor," they revive old animosities, and spend their lunch hours wrangling over political and racial differences.²

The very life of Marx belies his claim that men are primarily concerned in all phases of their existence with calculations of self-interest. The son of a successful lawyer, the son-in-law and brother-in-law of high government officials in Germany, he could have carved out for himself a comfortable career. Yet he chose the life of the revolutionary, spent his days in exile and in dire poverty, and broke his health writing books in behalf of the pro-

¹ *Communist Manifesto*, p. 27.

² Cf. J. Bryce, *Modern Democracies*, vol. i, 136-138.

letariat. The classical economist assumed self-interest only in one province of man's life, namely, the buying and selling of services and commodities. But Marx urges that in all spheres of life man is guided by material interests. He refuses to grant that an individual has many-sided interests, from religion and politics down to the lodge and the swimming club.

The class struggle is impossible unless the proletariat has a clear conception of its economic interests, and unless it is endowed with adequate knowledge of the means of furthering them. Even if we should grant that there are only two classes in society, and that each person is dominated wholly by motives of self-interest, no concerted and enduring class warfare will be the concomitant if the oppressed class is not fully intelligent as to the nature and requirements of its interests. Marx maintains that the proletariat is very favorably situated in this regard. This is consistent with his main view in such cases: the master class at any epoch in history has no difficulty in discerning the peculiar character of its interests and in devising the most effective safeguards in the form of an appropriate organization of the state, laws, morality, and religion. In fact, as was seen in a previous chapter, such, he thinks, is the origin of institutions.

This thesis raises some fundamental difficulties, and involves Marx in serious contradictions. The comprehension of one's true interests is not an isolated elementary task requiring but the rudimentary use of one's senses. It calls into exercise intellectual and spiritual faculties, like alert observation, keen discrimination, and wide-awake thinking; it is correlated with the diverse spheres of one's experiences and activities; and it is allied with one's whole outlook upon life, with one's accumulated wisdom. It is a difficult and far-reaching task. When the economist assumes that, by and large, the buyer pursues the dictates of self-interest, Marx is skeptical, remarking: "In bourgeois societies the economic *fictio juris* prevails that everyone, as a buyer, possesses an encyclopedic knowledge of commodities."¹ Marx is hypercritical toward others but inordinately lenient toward himself. If it requires encyclopedic knowledge to buy a pair of shoes,

¹ *Capital*, vol. i, 42 n.

and if the imputation of such knowledge to the buyer is a *factio juris*, what is required on the part of the proletarian to reconstruct the world, and what name shall we give to the imputation of such miraculous prowess to him?

With Marx it is all very simple: the class beholds its material interests and decides to take measures that will fortify them; hence the class struggle, the toppling of old orders, and the creation of new ones with appropriate institutions. But this is a problem that demands abilities of the highest order. The proletariat will have to possess the true philosophy of social evolution; gain a synthetic view of the unseen foundations and premises on which our system rests; see with a clear eye all the pathological manifestations of the present régime; be in intimate communion with the possibilities and solutions that reality harbors within its bosom; and then steadfastly proceed to dissolve the present order and to build wisely and securely a new and better one! In all this, external facts cannot serve as the sole and infallible guides. Reality and the dialectic may behave in their own way; but the reaction of individuals is not automatic and does not exhibit mechanical simplicity. Reality is to be diligently observed, rightly understood, and accurately interpreted; and subsequent conduct will call for sedulous study, deliberation, and foresight. It is one thing to buy commodities, it is a vastly different thing to reconstruct the universe.

It is absurd to ascribe such powers to wage-earners viewed as a class-conscious group. Marx writes glibly on the revolutionary events of 1848, discusses with a deft pen the interests of the various classes and factions involved, and indicates with the finger of the expert what tactics they should have pursued. It was all so clear to Marx; yet, as he points out in the discussions, the proletariat was utterly blind to its interests, and was tossed about from pillar to post, not knowing what to do. Of course, Marx would retort that at that time the working class was immature, that the mode of production was not as yet a good teacher, and that with the progress of capitalism all will ultimately become clear. If so, how did Marx happen to know what reality was not ready to teach? Furthermore, with the progress of time condi-

tions will become more complex and the issues more intricate. Capitalism shows no such trend toward idyllic simplicity that he who runs may expect to learn all its secret workings. Marx analyzes in the three volumes of his *Capital* the mechanism of the present order, displays the devastating work of the dialectic, and indicates where the interests of the workers lie. How many workers are interested in reading these volumes, and of those who read, how many understand them?

The truth is that neither the worker nor the capitalist is the person Marx paints. The worker is not a Prometheus. He has a multiplicity of interests, and is swayed by passions, ignorance, and prejudices. The vexing problems connected with the modern order and with the furtherance of its destinies he realizes very little; nor do they disturb his mind much. The average worker is concerned with his personal daily cares, not with social evolution and economic apocalypses; and direct, near-by interests are closer to his heart and loom larger in his horizon than remote and general interests. The immediate prospect of a higher or lower wage is of greater import to him than the extirpation of capitalism and the salvation of mankind. A few enthusiasts would be willing to suffer privations and to strive for a dream. The ordinary person is more prosaic. There is abstinence involved here, — although Marx hates the word, — and in abstinence, as Professor Carver points out, there are non-competing groups. The great mass is interested in small, present gains. It is interested, if at all, in middle-class unionism, and not in the dialectic antics or in the metempsychoses of surplus value. If the worker has ambition at all, it lies rather in the direction of saving, of investing, and of becoming a small capitalist himself. His leanings are toward capitalism, not toward socialism. In a capitalistically advanced country like the United States the "proletarians" vote for the Republican or the Democratic candidates. Their votes do not go in an avalanche for the socialist or for the avowedly "pro-labor" aspirant. Nor is the capitalist always a blind, greedy, unyielding person. Under the influence of public opinion, laws, social reform, a better knowledge of industrial psychology, and a more enlightened view of where his interests really lie, he is

changing his attitude. The capitalist class is more pliant, more willing to compromise and to live and let live than Marx ever dreamed. The laborer is not eternally on the warpath, and the capitalist is not the inveterate provider of a *casus belli*.

The insistence that the proletarian class perceives its interests without difficulty is in direct contradiction to some of Marx's views. He urges that most people do not comprehend the nature of reality about them, and that they judge by superficial appearances. Only a few superior intellects penetrate beneath the surface, investigate the essence of phenomena, and derive scientific truths. Even a man like J. S. Mill is at times denied the honor of a place among these chosen few. How, then, can Marx ascribe such extraordinary qualities to the masses of the workers? A man who cares nothing for "so-called public opinion," who admonishes the investigator to seek the causes of social transformations in material facts and not in the false notions filling the heads of the acting agents, who condemns the bulk of society as victims of illusions, cannot consistently bestow on the vast population of the proletarians the rare scientific powers of observation, discrimination, and objectivity that characterize true thought.

Marx refuses to grant anyone a thorough comprehension of phenomena if the corrupting influence of self-interest is injected into his mind. He denies political economy the claim to a science since 1830, because the economists, he argues, contaminated themselves with class interests. The same condemnation ought to fall on the proletariat, for it too is, above all, actuated, in the Marxian scheme, by calculations of self-interest. It too is far from possessing a dispassionate attitude and an unbiased vision so indispensable for an adequate understanding of social manifestations. Of course, Marx would retort that the interests of the proletariat are identical with the interests of society as a whole. But this would hardly remove the difficulty. In the first place, self-interest under any circumstances is not scientific objectivity. In the second place, it is not legitimate to identify the proletarians with society as a whole and to make their interests synonymous with its interests.

Marx's view that the proletariat is competent to remodel so-

ciety involves him in another contradiction. In the formation of human nature and in the acquisition of ideas Marx puts most stress on the effects of the environment, and he almost wholly disregards innate capacities. In what environment he places the workers as the capitalistic régime progresses we well know. It is not clear why a brutalized, bedraggled, ignorant working class should be fit to understand the dialectic mechanics of the present complicated system, to dissolve it, and to build a new and glorious order. A race of wage slaves cannot be a race of world rejuvenators, in the eyes of an environmentalist.

Thus the two pillars on which Marx builds his theory are insecure. The mode of production cannot be accepted as the original phenomenon, or as the sole and independent cause of all the occurrences in history. The idea of the class struggle is based on the weak assumptions that there are, ultimately, only two classes in society, that economic self-interest is the principal motive in all the phases of a person's life, and that the workers possess infallible knowledge of their interests and a complete understanding of the best means of promoting them. Marx thought that he had founded a theory which revealed for the first time how the course of civilization is steered by impersonal laws precisely as nature is, and that he had finally brought history into the estate of a natural science. But he deceived himself. The inclusion of science in the mode of production ushers in a more or less wayward, non-mechanical agency, since scientific inventions and the workings of the human mind refuse to behave with the regularity and predictability of natural phenomena. A still more disturbing element is introduced by his theory of the class struggle. In the perception of their interests and in their behavior on the basis of these interests the workers do not act in an automatic, reflexive manner. They cannot. The perception and evaluation of interests involve an understanding of the overwhelming complexities of the modern order, and postulate the powers of reorganizing the social structure. Tropismic reactions cannot achieve such things. Interpretation, thinking, and planning, ignorance, passion, and prejudice come into activity, invited or uninvited — and these

insert a non-materialistic and non-predictable factor.¹ As soon as Marx introduces the human reaction, his theory loses the claim to objectivity. His interpretation of history cannot get along with the human element and remain objective. Nor can it do without it and not remain meaningless.

¹ Cf. Veblen, *Place of Science in Modern Civilization*, pp. 417, 437.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE THEORY

UPON analysis, the materialistic interpretation proves to fall short of the place claimed for it by its authors and upholders. What shall we think of it, then? What place has it earned for itself?

Some will reply that this question can be answered readily by a pragmatic test. The fact that Marx's theory has exerted a marked influence on social movements indicates that the theory must possess important elements of truth. And indeed it has had an enormous influence on the socialist creed. There have been radicals since time immemorial. Each order, each society has had its critics, who have contended that they could do better. There would have been new radical schemes of one kind or another without Marx. Yet the socialist movement owes him an everlasting debt. He endowed it with a definite form, infused new vitality into it, and launched it on a more vigorous, more pretentious career. He equipped the socialists with theories, watchwords, and methods of attack upon the existing order. He endowed the movement with the dignity of reason and science, and made it appear no longer as a medley of hopes, fantasies, and exhortations; he fortified it with the assurance of ultimate triumph by proving that socialism is the sublime end toward which creation moves, the chosen masterpiece of history. And not socialism alone but also other radical currents derive strength from his teachings. Fabianism, syndicalism, bolshevism, communism, all draw ammunition from the copious arsenal he provided.

However, the popularity of a doctrine is no guaranty of its truth. An idea circulates among people, agitates them, and at times galvanizes them into action not because, upon their careful deliberation, it proves to disclose a powerful truth, but because it appeals to their emotions. The proclamation that the very productive forces are fighting on the side of the abused and the

lowly possesses a mystical power. The picture of the proletariat coöperating with the dialectic in sweeping the Augean stables of iniquity and in erecting a new and glorious social order, has an apocalyptic majesty that burns the imagination and releases emotional energy. We govern men by words, remarked Disraeli.

It is different when an idea takes possession of the minds of scientists, furnishing them with a principle which leads them to fruitful labors. Then the inference is that the idea must have vitality. But such has hardly been the case with Marx's doctrine of history. Here and there a well-known economist, historian, or sociologist reflects Marx's influence at one point or another. It is seen in some chapters of J. A. Hobson's books, in some of Thorstein Veblen's writings, and in Werner Sombart's works — to mention only a few economists. But it is safe to say that at any given time the number of distinguished social scientists who are wholehearted adherents of Marx's theory is exceedingly limited. The socialists are fond of comparing Marx's work in social science to Darwin's achievement in natural science. But the reception the scientific world has given to Marx does not begin to compare with the reception given to Darwin.

We must turn, then, directly to the philosophy of history for an appraisal of it. Marx plunged into a task without having asked himself first whether it was capable of accomplishment. There are grounds for reasonable doubt whether a single or definitive philosophy of history can be constructed. At any rate, the attempt is beset with enormous difficulties. Marx tried to build a theory of history out of four elements — the mode of production, self-interest, the perception of self-interest, and the dialectic. The last three he synthesized into the class struggle; and he thus obtained the formula of the mode of production and the class struggle. He failed where failure was inevitable and, in the nature of the case, hardly discreditable. Imponderables and solids cannot be reduced to one dimension. History refuses to be imprisoned in formulas.

But Marx is unpardonably weak when he addresses himself to the concrete analysis of the present system in order to discover its fatal defects, its tendency toward dissolution, and its intima-

tions respecting the nature of the coming society; when, in other words, he ventures to write a detailed chapter of his conception of history. Then he becomes an economist pure and simple. And he blunders repeatedly.

His old theory of value is contrary to experience, his revised theory contains nothing new. His idea of surplus value is based on the prejudice that labor constitutes the only cost. His system of distribution — that is, his doctrine of wages, interest, profits, and rent — presents no deeper or broader elaboration than the one left by economists who preceded him. His theory of crises is little more than the doubtful theory of overproduction. His law of population is vague and unconvincing. His insistence on the harmful effects of the greater accumulation of capital because of the correlative displacement of the man by the machine, on the increasing impoverishment of the workers with the progress of capitalism, on the ever-accelerating process of centralization of industry; his refusal to see any connection between abstinence and interest, to discern any contribution of the business man in production and anything but exploitation in his gains — these and others of his views are based on inadequately thought-out ideas or on a stubborn unwillingness to analyze facts with the sincerity of the dispassionate scientist who has no preconceived standards and norms of his own.¹

“The books on socialism deal largely with controversies which do not proceed to the heart of the matter. This seems to me to hold of K. Marx, *Das Kapital* . . . the most famous and influential of socialist books.” Such is Professor Taussig’s verdict;² and any fair-minded reader of Marx’s masterpiece must agree with this opinion. At times it may appear that where others are content to angle placidly with hook and line, Marx dredges earnestly and deeply; but, on closer examination, the dredge proves worn, and its wooden teeth yield, after all his labors, a little slime with which to bespatter the capitalist order. Professor Seligman says that “. . . perhaps with the exception of Ricardo, there has been

¹ For Marshall’s opinion of Marx’s theory of value and distribution see *Principles of Economics*, 8th edition, pp. 587–588. Cf. appendix, p. 769.

² *Principles of Economics*, vol. ii, 3d edition, p. 502.

no more original, no more powerful, and no more acute intellect in the entire history of economic science.”¹ It would be idle to quarrel over Marx’s intellect. It is clear, however, that his intellect hardly added anything to the store of economic principles and generalizations. In economic theory he was, on the whole, a follower and not a leader. We must not forget that among his contemporaries were such economists as Cournot, Gossen, Jevons, Knies, Mangoldt, Menger, Mill, Walras. When grouped with them, Marx fails to occupy a foremost position, so far as specific contributions to economic theory are concerned.

J. M. Keynes says of Marx’s system:

The principles of *laissez-faire* . . . have been reinforced by the poor quality of the opponent proposals — Protectionism on one hand, and Marxian Socialism on the other. . . . Both are examples of poor thinking, of inability to analyze a process and follow it out to its conclusion. . . . Of the two, Protectionism is at least plausible. . . . But Marxian Socialism must always remain a portent to the historians of Opinion — how a doctrine so illogical and so dull can have exercised so powerful and enduring an influence over the minds of men, and through them, the events of history.²

As was suggested above, the doctrine had such an influence, not because it worked on the minds of men, but because it appealed to their hearts.

Nor could it be different if we have in mind his intellectual and temperamental constitution. Marx was a mixture of things. That he had a logical head cannot be denied. This may seem paradoxical in face of his repeated contradictions and errors of logic. It is true, however, that when he was so inclined he could sustain a rigorously logical argument with marvelous tenacity. His theory of land rent is an example.³ But he was also a Hegelian, and he was never quite successful in divorcing himself from his master. This is often the case. An individual who has once immersed himself in the Hegelian philosophy and become thoroughly permeated with it, emerges a different person forever, and can hardly tear off the Hegelian glasses. This was true of Marx. He coquetted with Hegel again and again — in his discussions of

¹ *The Economic Interpretation of History*, p. 56.

² *Laissez-Faire*, pp. 47-48.

³ *Capital*, vol. iii, part 6.

value, of money, of the metamorphoses of capital, of classes and class struggles. Times without number he invokes the aid of the dialectic where facts and reasoning would be more pertinent. He has a peculiar love for antitheses. He appears to think that his argument has gained strength and authority when he mentions "contradictions." Thus and thus it will pass because of the inherent "contradictions" of the phenomenon . . . and Marx rests satisfied that his conclusion is built on a solid basis.

Then Marx, notwithstanding socialistic protestations to the contrary, was not generally the assiduous, slow, and self-critical thinker. He was something of an artist, of an impressionist. He was full of flashes, suggestions, and fresh points of view. He saw things in his own way, and he had his own feelings about the facts around him. Brilliant, impatient, he seized the pen as soon as an idea came upon him, and wrote. Hence the wealth of ideas, but also the harvest of inconsistencies and obscurities. True, in his writings we often notice repetitions, examples, illustrations, and a curious propensity for different approaches to the same point. But in most cases, evidently, this is merely a pedagogical device for driving the idea home, and not testimony to his having coolly weighed and carefully thought out the problem.

Finally, he was by nature a crusader, a propagandist. He felt deeply and allowed the emotions to take the upper hand when a judicious and calm consideration of the facts might have led to more modest but sounder verdicts. He was certain that the modern order is wrong; that it rests on an inadequate foundation, is guided by faulty principles, and possesses unworthy standards of value. He was at heart a revolutionary, thoroughly dissatisfied with things as they are. But he was not the soft-hearted sentimental seer. I suspect — and this is offered merely as a suggestion — that it was not love of the proletarians, heartache over their sufferings, a feeling of sympathy for them as his brothers, that started him on his radical career. Haughty, tempestuous, and fiery intellectual aristocrat that he was, with swarms of admiring disciples at his feet, he really cared little for the masses of plain, untutored workers. "The masses were to him a brainless crowd whose thoughts and feelings were furnished by the ruling

class," writes Liebknecht.¹ What he liked in the proletarians, I suspect, was rather his own intellectual discovery of them. His theory of history, his whole system, caused his eyes to turn to the workers. They were the persons who would play the leading rôle in the great drama of the dialectic. They were the white pawns in his game.

Certain claims are sometimes made for Marx's theory of history which can hardly be granted. It is held that it rendered great service in widening the scope and in elaborating the methodology of social science, particularly economic. But it must be remembered that in his own country, before and during his day, this problem received wider and more thorough treatment. Suffice it to mention the names of Eichhorn, Savigny, List, Roscher, and Knies. Some see a contribution in Marx's emphasis on the relativity of economic generalizations and in his advice to lay more stress on the study of institutions as a guide to the understanding of social phenomena. If this is to be considered a contribution, the credit must go rather to the economists of the German historical school, who since the forties of the last century had cultivated this ground more intensively than Marx. Then there are some who pay him tribute for the "discovery" that the various aspects of social life are coördinated phenomena and not stray, disjointed fields foreign to each other. Such a view is significant, but it is not original with Marx. It is as old as the Greeks, and Montesquieu, Burke, Herder, Saint-Simon, and others had given it new emphasis.

The service of Marx's theory lies in other directions. We may remain aware of the shortcomings of a theory while appreciating its enduring values. Marx's doctrine was a powerful antidote to older and even more one-sided views of history. In his time, some regarded history as the special creation of "great men"; others treated it from the angle of dynastic ambitions and political maneuverings; still others clothed it in one variety or another of mystical idealism. Marx's view dealt a fatal blow to such conceptions. He called the historians from their lofty imaginings down to the earth of humble economic facts.

¹ *Karl Marx, Biographical Memoirs*, p. 82.

Herein is the chief significance of his conception of history. His doctrine is neither an interpretation, nor a philosophy, nor a method of history. It is a canon. It admonishes the student of the history of social manifestations not to neglect the careful study of the economic factors — the forms of economic organization, the class structure, the play of group interests. Such a study will shed light on many historical phenomena; but it will be inadequate to interpret history. Marx's theory is a key that fits many locks but opens few doors.

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